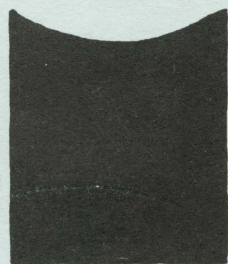


Ky. Room

VOLUME VII, NUMBER 1 FALL 1974



**nscape**



Volume VII, Number 1

Fall, 1974

nscape

Division of Languages and Literature

Morehead State University

Morehead, Kentucky

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Inscape prints the best work submitted and encourages by publication the beginning writers and artists at Morehead State University. The editorial board wishes to thank the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., and the Kentucky Arts Commission for two awards recently presented to Inscape.



Fall

1974

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Number 1

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## Six poems by Darrell R. Moneyhon

### THE MANIA IN GROWTH

Notice the mania in growth as time pushes to extremes,  
and watch complex realities evolve from dreams.  
Sharp systems are developed on a natural course  
while mountainous cities display great force.

Man has a madness in his longing heart  
to extend nature's glory through human art.  
We contrive for perfection by blind desire,  
instinctively flexing our minds to aspire.

Forward into darkness our lives are hurried  
that we might find light where truth is buried,  
that in infinite consciousness all will be known,  
even the purpose of our having grown.



## TWO BASIC TYPES OF TRUTH

There are two basic types of truth:  
One will walk through a door,  
But the other lives a private life  
And has never been seen before.

The former spills on a canvas  
Or out the mouths of men  
And is seen in countless movements  
Over and over again.

The latter, however, is hidden  
beyond man's searching soul  
And, in its perfect state,  
Remains life's distant goal.

You see, two gods were in the sky-  
One fell on mountains green,  
But the other stayed so high  
That it has never ever been seen.



### BRAINLACE

Big jewel-like words,  
arranged on a fine strong string,  
can, it is true,  
be worn around the brain  
to add a little sparkle  
to the gray.

### RELATIVITY

To a man the toad is small,  
but to a fly it's not at all.

### FLASHES

Something tells me  
That everything I think  
Something tells me.

### LOVER'S TALK

Oft we talk with one another  
and not a word is said,  
but there is a conversation  
in a region of the head.

## CLEAR CREEK FURNACE

A tower of stone, a Babel monument,  
Today stands fenced in to keep people out.  
The stone furnace, massive and strong, is cold--  
The blast no longer felt within its walls.  
But once its heat forged both metal and men.  
Iron men sweated as they dug foundations  
In rock. They cut more rock and built  
Laboriously the high fortress walls.  
Their bronzed muscles torn with the strain of days  
Found no relief with their task completed:  
The locomotive needed all their iron.

Straight iron rails reaching west, iron wheels moving  
Impatient civilization into  
A reluctant land, the locomotive  
Steamed constantly forward, stopped only at  
The end of the line. The railroad used iron;  
Iron that overpowered the buffalo,  
Iron that conquered the Indian nations,  
Iron that linked a free land to the conflict  
Of people unable to understand  
Themselves, or the nature of a new world.  
The iron rails with ties to last forever  
Had formed a bond that would not be broken,  
Although that took the blood of men to prove.

But the iron of the railroads was costly,  
And for iron, blood was first shed on Clear Creek.  
Human flesh worked with the hot smelting fires  
Not without pain. The men bled willingly--  
Sturdy men smelting the freshly dug ore  
To create something indestructible.  
The work in the rock furnace showed they were  
Joining the triumph of their nation's growth;  
The hard metal symbolized these men's role,



For they, too, felt the fires and burned white hot  
In flesh not made for immortality.  
Yet men sought in the metal a new strength  
To last the ages to tell their story:  
They worked to gain a place always to be  
Remembered--outlasting the mountain rock  
They had mastered for their singular task.

Today those rails are rusting quietly,  
Deserted sidings are choked by weeds. Wheels  
That once polished the rails each day are scrapped.  
Forgotten and decayed, man's proud display  
Is ruined. The traces lasting now but prove  
All man's attempts to feed with palsied hand  
His nature's appetite for constancy  
Fall like crumbs beneath quick Time's table.  
The furnace stands, the huge brown stones unchanged,  
To make a home for the chameleon.  
A tree has grown from its summit, and vines  
Climb securely up its walls. All life  
May rest in its shadow, content to know  
Nature reclaims her stone long ago lost.

Gary Light



## YOUNG OAKS

He stood beside the broken truck, half hearted,  
And limply lifted his thumb.  
Need a lift? I stopped and asked.  
Yes, I do, he answered, need to go home;  
Ella's expectin'.

He smelled of grease and oil, beer and sweat,  
Green oak sawdust, and chain saw gas.  
Took a load of paper-wood north today.  
I was stopped by state patrol; green oak  
Sticks are too heavy; overloaded, he said.



Twenty-nine fifty I paid the Judge.  
I need the money too, cause  
Ella's expectin'.

White oak wood is bringing eight dollars a ton.  
My load brought sixty-four seventy at the mill.  
I paid my fine, was hot and drunk some beer.  
Started south and was picked up again.  
"You've drunk too much," the lawman said.  
But we'll cut the charge to reckless driving--  
That will only cost you fifty-six ninety.  
But I need the money, Judge,  
Ella's expectin'.

Truck's broke down now, he said.  
To hell with paper-wood--  
It's cheaper than dirt; I can't make it pay--  
I can't make payments on my saw,  
Fix the truck and all, besides,  
Ella's expectin'.

Would you care to stop in town? he asked.  
Ella may be in the hospital now.  
She helped me lift that load of sticks.  
Paper-wood is five foot long, you know  
No less than four inches across and no more than nineteen thru'.  
She said she felt something tear.  
If you've got the time, let's stop and see.  
I'm worried about Ella now:  
She's expectin'.

We waited outside the spotless room.  
He went in and I stood outside the door.  
Came too soon they said, lost the child  
But Ella would survive.  
Come in and see my Ella, he said.  
She's alive, but the little boy didn't make it.

She pulled his unshaven head down close and said,  
I'm sorry Jed, but we'll try again  
When I get better.

He paced the floor and wrung his hat  
Within his hands--a broken man.  
To hell with heavy paper-wood sticks--  
To hell with broken trucks and chain saw debts--  
To hell with cutting young oaks before their time.

John R. Howerton



## HE RIVALS APPOLLO'S BRIGHT SUN

He rivals Appollo's bright sun  
For in his eyes, the lights that play  
Send forth rays which strike with  
Warmth, and return with visions of beauty.  
His fiery head holds all the glory  
Of a king's throne and a king's thoughts,  
And with his mighty hands,  
He carves an empire from the wild.  
With those same hands, he smooths  
A baby's silky brow.  
He stands beside the gods of all time  
For men to hold in awe.

Robin Stigall

## THE RECORD SPINNING

The record spinning through time  
                        warps  
me back to summer 4 o'clock  
morning, sunshine  
                    in the night rain  
and your face looks the same...

And the time roars on...  
light-blown -- tremble-soaring  
through the night sky...

The candle's been talking for three hours,  
and I haven't said a thing--  
The candle's been burning forever...  
and I just blew us out.

Bill Kegley

THE M. A.

In the shadow of broken fingers  
    contented and unrelenting  
lie the mothers of realists  
drawing down into the click of  
    rounded crooked-straightness  
that straightened-crookedness  
    can never round away.

Your mother, my mother, our collective  
    Mother; i am not talking about  
The Universe  
    I am talking about  
those spider-ladies  
    on late night tv  
who creep into your room  
    even later at night  
and suck away your personhood  
    soon-to-be-adulthood  
on the traditional teary-eyed-dawn  
    before the traditional  
    HIGH-school graduation.

She is just your Ma.  
    You spell it M A.

David Williams



## TOUCHED

A single star faded past  
My horizon last night  
Never to be seen again,  
Except perhaps by some wise all seeing God.  
And in the softness of a summer grass,  
Untouched by lawnmowers  
And fed only on spring rains,  
I got to thinking about all the he's and she's  
Who touched my life in some unremembered moment  
And then just as quickly disappeared.  
I've met thousands--  
From paper bag boys in groceries  
To soft spoken waitresses in hamburger palaces.  
And now looking back,  
The discussions on weather  
And the price of eggs  
Seem so trivial,  
Like hands waved between gliding sailboats  
Never really reaching to touch--  
Only to acknowledge  
    some similar human existence.  
And in the realization  
    I feel a loss  
Of something individual and unique--  
Gone to me in the grapple of time.

Maryanne Walters

## A CRYPTIC COMMUNION

Come, dare my sweetness Marianne--  
Claim faerie seas in my bed;  
In furry heat my life beweds--  
Climax confirms Israeli lands.  
We vex the firmest contrary hands--  
Heat waxes night, least, all be said  
Are matters that leave mortals dead--  
Red seas in death night will cleave sand.  
Dare God mandate fertility  
Or share milk bleeding from your breasts?  
In black hills men seek clear blue still--  
Fear seeks a bleak reality--  
Reeking weakest bliss and life's pests.  
God seeks a kiss and leaves peace nill.

## THE WHITE HORSE

He rose at night from some north star  
Upon a horse that Heaven knows  
To collect a debt that men owe--  
I read it coming at that hour.  
And dead men ran from flinging fire  
That hid from them, the dead, their holes;  
And only God knows what men sow--  
Now that from God's house he has rose.  
Woes and death, heat and wrath--Slow white  
Horse in man's night, with God's glory  
Ride upon all high men and then...  
Tell them why men died with one light  
Fell clothed in dingy poetry!  
What dead men said has an end.

Ken Casper



## FOR TONI

Her body sprawled upon the bed  
Reminds one of that glamorous pose  
Often used by "movie stars"  
Or vamps, or tramps.

Of slumber found in marble positions.  
Greek art personified  
Reclining, arm enwrapping  
Her feather pillow of expression.

Dianne Zimmerman

## ESCAPE

My forehead has a permanent wrinkle that will take  
Months of tearless happy days to erase.  
I long for the bland expression I used to wear  
And the purity of living I used to strive for.

It will take a while to pull myself from hell,  
But I will escape it and rejoice.  
Humans have their various hells and mine is  
Being dependent on something completely undependable.

Bonnie Spencer



Outhouse

Steve Saunders





Destination...?

Deborah Powers



## Eight Poems by Jeffrey Rice

### THE OLD MAN: LISTENING

The old man listens in his room  
beneath his third son's clamor ringing defiantly  
through the halls: "Listen, old man!"

the son sings out, "Listen!" he says  
and throws his empty bottles to the floor  
or against the wall, then crashes  
on the bed with that girl.

The lily white arms sweep drunkenly  
about his neck the old man sees in his mind  
the lily white arms dragging the young son down  
to the bed to the soiled sheet to lust  
in the room where the mother once laid clean sheets  
and shed the first blood of love, embracing  
the old man with warm clean arms, so unlike the lily arms  
tainting the sheets and son

while the old man listens to the drunken laughter  
and animal hunger of his own third son  
and the whore with wide red lips and fingering tongue

The old man listens in his room  
to his son's cries to his own life crashing  
on the bed and the floor His own blood roars  
with liquor and the hot flesh of a blonde  
wrapping her lily arms about his life  
about his own soul pulling his head down  
while he cries in secret.



## HE WAS A VERY OLD MAN

"This, this is justice," he said,  
folding his face to watch us  
nod our heads and diagram his words.

Thus we caught each statement,  
which spread throughout our lot  
and to the hills beyond.  
Each spoken image etched in bark,

passed from hand to hand,  
was carried on our individual trips  
beyond the trees. When we gathered  
in a glen or mountain cave

the wind in leaves  
regarded sweet refrain;  
"Yes," we whispered privately  
and it echoed once again.

Still a few remained with him  
to garner later words  
and bear them to the rest of us.  
"Truth is," he had said, "and life."

And more, much more,  
so that our own eyes grew wise  
as summers passed to falls  
which brought his final days.

So that we, the Own Few,  
gathered by his golden bed  
to touch his pleated robe  
and sing, "We know. We know."

while listening for his final words.  
"But that, that is not all." he said.

## DREAMING IN 1974 OF SOUPLINES IN CHICAGO

What are we doing now  
dreaming in 1974 of souplines?  
Has the Way become unfocused  
as we traipse through our markets  
and wait at the service stations?  
We rush to be filled  
with sirloins, T-bones,  
and high-test ethyl supreme.  
If we seem in a hurry  
it's for raisins, for sour-pit cherries,  
for discount flour and a 5¢ cigar.  
The stock in the aisle is dwindling  
so we're stocking our own shelves.

Even the rabbits in Georgia  
hop less casually now;  
it's said by certain zoologists  
that already they've evolved  
increased peripheral vision,  
for lean eyes watch their flight,  
hungry to catch a specimen,  
while even the western impalas  
roam in larger flocks.

Ah, we're nervous people.  
Rumors spread from Wisconsin  
and in Washington we rush  
to the supermarkets  
to load our carts with Charmin,  
with Scot Tissue, and IGA Super Soft.  
We're terrified of shortages.  
Look! Here is our money!  
We're saving against shutdowns of mills,  
against the ravages of the Japanese.  
We still remember the slick sheen  
of a Sears Roebuck catalog.



We're hoarding for winter diarrhea.

We have been one so long  
with the midnight whirl  
we're desperate to remain  
in a familiar element.  
Even in dreams we herd across the country  
applauding Disney World  
and burrow in discotheques.

Our dates are swinging  
more than writers ever dreamed.  
Chrome sparkles in our homes and on our ears.  
We're laughing through our teflon teeth.  
This hectic pace is wild with polyethylenes.

But we cannot escape the reoccurring dreams.  
Somewhere buried deep are tales  
from our fathers and grandfathers  
and our shining products  
afford us little comfort.  
As we pass the dwindling stock on shelves  
or wait in lengthening lines for gas,  
dreams come drifting through  
of dust-filled clouds,  
of busted banks, of the long thin wail  
heralding the plunge from a top-floor penthouse,  
and the souplines in Chicago.

#### ONGLEMAN: A CASE FOR GRAVITY

When he performed  
he was transformed somehow  
to a wizard, more a wizened magician  
than a teacher, for Ongleman  
carried us into his spell.

Listen, he would say,  
We are all here, soaring seven hundred  
million miles through space,  
circling the sun, spinning  
through all time faster than any vehicle  
devised by man

And yet he would say,  
his voice barely more than a whisper,  
we are all still, standing solid  
on our section of earth

Gravity! Gravity! he would yell  
dancing to some unfingered tune  
Consider the gravity! and he would hurl  
projectiles about the room,  
tossing paper planes and throwing stones,  
laughing at each landing as he boomed

Gravity! Consider Gravity! dancing to the tune  
of his magic, and hurtling himself over chairs,  
across the floor into the small space  
of our classroom, then landing,  
feet firm, amid our awkward cheers.

For always we watched with awe, spellbound,  
ourselves brought somehow to the verge  
of discovering his vision,  
peering from the perimeter of mystery  
shaped for us by Ongleman's wild flights  
through the room, our hearts rising  
as we gathered in convocation,  
whispering prayers as he leaned from his room  
and looked down toward the street at the upturned faces  
which strained to see him leap from his window,  
his arms wide, all the voices  
crying with him for one last time Gravity! Gravity!  
as he landed at our feet.



PAUL HARDY EDGINGTON REJOICES AT THE PUBLICATION  
OF HIS BOOK OF SEVENTY-SEVEN LOVE POEMS

When Paul Hardy Edgington  
received his ninety-third rejection  
from one of the classier (sic) houses

and finally decided commercialism  
held merits of its own,  
he spent seven days and nights

with amphetamines and fury,  
listening to country western  
and scanning successful (sic) contemporaries

while he produced a manuscript  
of seventy-seven love poems  
which brought tears from his mother

and sent his sister to bed  
with a man whose affections  
she'd ignored for two years

and the publisher's shared his fever  
while the hosts of tv-talkies  
crooned for his affections.

But Paul Hardy Edgington bathed  
in secret, and colored himself,  
painting valentines across his chest

and over his face, emptying  
magic markers to produce a second marvel,  
then burned his early poems

and hung himself,  
his tongue an exclamation point.

## THE DAY THE SWEETGUM TREE GOT OUT OF FATHER'S ORCHARD

Howling, we lapped the wind with our tongues,  
caught in fever with our nostrils quivering  
to follow the smell of orchard earth,  
fighting the mingling scents of oak and maple  
to seek the weetgum which escaped.

Mad to catch our prey, we licked the earth  
for scanty signs of trail, until one root weakened,  
then more, as the sweetgum tired and drug its roots,  
pointing a path through ginseng and moss,  
tattooing its bark and sap across brown leaves.  
We were filled with odor, our senses drained,  
as we ran headlong, tongues flying  
until we reached the grandsire sweetgum  
where we found our prey.

There in the center of the forest  
we pulled our tree from those shielding limbs  
and drug it back to the orchard earth  
to rebury the bleeding roots in domesticated soil.  
Singing, shouting, gesticulating to the heavens,  
we sung our victory song.

But in the night which found us sure  
and carried us to the haven of our beds,  
where we dreamed of flaring nostrils caught in wind  
and eyes burning down long trails,  
moonlight warmed, shone out,  
and caught the pear and apple orchard.

There, amid the civil fare of cultured trees,  
the sweetgum escaped its bounds again.  
Shimmering light reflected its slender limbs  
and those that followed suit.  
For the pear and apple limbs responded to some ancestral urge,



unloosing their long embrace with all the earth they knew;  
slipping from the orchard dirt, they moaned,  
reached silently for sky.

#### HUNTING DOG

The dog is surely gone for good by now  
though I thought he would come home somehow.

He must have never found a trail  
and is looking in the forest still,

Though it must have been nine days  
since I saw him run or heard his bay.

That last night we travelled deep within the trees  
he tracked like fire, coursing through the leaves

Raising each foot faster still till he became a blur  
lifting his voice all the while, louder, wanting more.

Some scent drove him wild that night it seems  
for I watched him jump into a swollen stream.

The water carried him fast somewhere:  
I thought he may have found his quarry there.

## THE APPEASEMENT OF THE ORGAN GRINDER'S MONKEY

Even the vetinarian  
could not help the organ grinder  
claiming distemper had maddened  
his monkey, recommending euthanasia  
to end the anger;  
so the organ grinder,  
feeling overwhelmed, bought a pistol,  
expecting to end the episode himself  
until the pair's psychiatrist  
recommended his good friend,  
a singular man, the expedient physicist  
whose incredible lazer beam cut  
the problem in a split second,  
blinding the monkey so he was satisfied  
and could finally stand complacent  
in the droning of the grinder's organ:  
feeling rather than seeing  
the crowd pushing by dropping their pennies.



## Four Poems by Anne Shelby

### THE LITTLE KINGS

The little kings  
Sit on their little thrones  
And rule their little kingdoms  
And their little subjects  
Bow to them  
And pretend that they agree  
This is the only kingdom in the world.

### SMILE

If you gave me a smile  
A real smile  
That didn't mean  
You're cute/I forgive you/let's go to bed

I think I could give you a smile  
A real smile  
That didn't mean  
Yes I know I'm tired but I'm trying to be nice

## APPALACHIAN WOMAN

Flat bones  
Flat bones  
and long long arms

White eyes  
White hollow eyes  
That look like they've seen a thousand years  
of birth, death, and trying to get along

She knows  
She knows what the philosophers know  
That all there really is  
Is birth, death, and trying to get along

## PRETEND

My little boy  
rides his tricycle  
pretends it's a car  
waves good-bye  
on his pretend way to work  
carries his dolls around  
pretends they're his children

And his father and I  
look on the calendar for a time  
On the map for a place  
We could go  
To pretend we're children again



## Four Poems by Sheila Faye Newsome

### RAIN

Rain comes in little drops  
Like Morton Salt  
When it's poured out of the box.  
Rain plays a soft melody  
Like the Lettermen.  
Never will you hear  
Rain sound like Joplin or the Stones.  
Rain cools my face  
Like a glass of lemonade in summer.  
Rain, wonderful wet gift  
That God gave us,  
Keep up your Morton Salt routine.

### COLD

Stark, colorless trees  
Set against dark grey skies  
In a chill that can only be winter's  
Looking out of my warm, bright room  
I see nothing but blackness.  
I wish the world would blossom,  
But it's too late now,  
The darkness doesn't wait  
For seasons any more.  
I shiver in the greyness,  
There is no warmth any more.

## PIG-SLAYER

Pit me not  
Oh almighty pig slayer.  
I am not swine,  
I can rise out of the stink of the pen,  
But you will always be a pig slayer.  
You will always stand  
With a knife dripping blood in your hand.  
Oh! You are most contemptible  
So do not pity me!  
Tell me, repulsive one,  
What do you feel like when you jump astride  
Your squealing victim  
And slit his throat?  
Are you elated by killing?  
I cannot see you, dog!  
I can feel your pity like boiling water  
Running down my spine.  
I may be blind,  
But I am not a pig slayer!

## UNREAL

It's all unreal  
Little windup dolls  
In toy land.  
As long as we're wound  
We smile, we sing, we hate.  
When we're unwound  
We lie with head hung on chest  
Pitying ourselves and  
Out of touch with the rest.  
It's all unreal.



## Eight Poems by Roberta Webster

### LADY AT THE WINDOW

Empty  
And who will pay the rent this month?  
A hollow room  
The blinds drawn tight  
Against a skeleton.  
The paneling is loose  
And shaking at each movement.  
Outside murder happens;  
Inside murdered listens.  
Silent quaking at the rocks of children  
Thrown in gaps for friendly pastime.  
Rocks are welcomed  
As are spears  
And other stabs  
At communication.

### BASS PLAYER

Something that you are  
Delivers up those low-toned  
Fuzzy vowels.  
The bowing-growls of self-  
Sliding easily next to  
My hollow sweetness:  
The edge of not quite soprano  
Alto ether  
Is tempered by the depth,  
The high of low.

## DOGIES

Out in the keen  
Blues air  
He still opens  
His arm to  
Let in the  
Cowboy rider of  
Rivers.

White Lightening whinnies  
Her nostrils flare  
Open the opal-scratched  
Eyeballs bleed like the  
Rivers the cowboy  
Must ride

Over them they  
Cast a shadow of  
Skeleton blue for  
The constant vein  
Memory the mouth of  
All river-red valleys  
All rio grand  
Dreams.

Pecos then met with  
The desert  
Bone symptoms and  
Rope burns  
Coyotes to herald his  
Dry back-door entrance to  
Heaven.

## THE RITUAL

He stood tall  
in the basement  
(Pink and white everywhere  
making the room look  
like icing.)

His black curly head hanging  
down  
He studied his shoes  
And tried not to see  
(Blue and lace flying  
at him  
Landing in unopened hand  
like a horsefly.)

His ears caught  
the laughter  
And all eyes caught  
red of surprise  
As he looked  
at the white-beaded heart:

Blue garter reminded  
"You're next."



## OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE (LIFE GOES ON)

I spoke the words;  
He spoke the song.  
All the same it's music  
Tempered in our acid souls to singing  
High and desperate.  
Lonely registers recall with  
Woodwind hollow  
The aches that leaves will bury.  
His manuscript, his dream:  
My books, my mellow blanket  
Will eat us up, he said.  
No pieces left to tempt the hungry lions;  
No answers to the wide-mouthed sharks  
Who need the sea.  
Is it true that life goes on  
Outside the circle?  
I can hear their frightened laughter  
In the shadows  
Where the air plays its cruel motet.  
Uncalloused fingers tear themselves to pieces  
On the jagged glass strings.  
He takes dictation:  
All the rending screams transposed to measures;  
And I will try to tell you of the pain.

## KYRIE ELEISON

I worry about your arms  
How little they've become  
above the elbow.  
When you reach for shelves  
Can you touch them?  
Do the books edge farther when you stretch

To pull them?  
I worry about your eyes  
How you squint at  
Bold-faced neon screams  
"I'm sorry, I didn't see you bleeding there."  
The tears refuse to blur  
Your vision naturally.  
I worry about your heart  
How uneven beats leap  
Against your chest like  
Hari-kari soldiers in a blitz.  
I worry about your feet.  
The needles are so sharp  
And you, like Christ,  
Walk slowly up a hill  
Inviting frightened men  
To cast their lots for pieces  
Of your ragged jeans.

#### THE TROUBLE MIGHT BE IN YOUR SET

Your brown cameras film  
Me awkward, bending  
Out-of-shape ridiculous

Eyes too small  
Mouth too big  
Angles in my face scare  
Halloween masks.

I move like rock, stumbling  
Or elephant on toothpick  
Stilts: a carnival of  
Tilts and staggers crumbling  
Under stiffness.

You focus Lawrence Welk riding



Side-saddle on a purple ostrich,  
Blowing bubbles from a soap jar,  
Trying to sell you laxative,  
Patting heads of children,  
Regal like the Pope in long-johns,  
Unable to rejoice in  
Earphone paradises of  
Rolling Stone/Quadrophonic blues.

And yes, I've seen the videotape  
Played back.  
Clown, pawn, loser.  
A painted red smear half-looking  
like a face where mouth should  
Be and eyes,  
Ragdoll stitches into place  
Convenient holes where strings  
Can lace my movements into  
Recognizable step.

Microscopes show me fuzzy.  
No attention to the angles,  
Mouth or eyes.  
Catch the ragged edges,  
Left-handed leanings.  
Define by wandering protoplasmic  
Feet the side of head she wears  
Her part(if you can find it)  
Absences of war paint  
Stubbornness of jaw  
Bagginess of sleeves  
Scragginess of cuffs...  
Concave/convex those linear  
Items and bring them to  
Importance.  
Silence must mean obstinance;  
Fear must be reserve.

Etymologize your specimen  
Before it crawls away,  
One pseudopod aching  
At a time.

And yes, I've seen your  
Carefully labeled slides;  
The specimen pinned down on  
a mat board  
Drawn and white half-looking  
like a face.  
Dried, a painted red smear where  
Mouth should be, eyes  
Empty(Convenient holes)  
Glazed over with  
Formaldehyde to stop  
Those crazy movements where  
they lie.

#### YORK STREET

She was small and scruffy  
Almost negroid in her fuzzy curls  
Except for green eyes, wide and open,  
Peeping nose high into the booth.  
He was tall and wide  
Blank-faced like so many tall men  
In the tall world.  
All of them were belts  
Or knees  
Or buttons  
Never faces.  
He was growling something about prices



And she translated growls  
Into the sticky dimes and nickels  
Cherished warm and tightly  
In her summer brown hand.  
She hesitated...  
Wondering if her candied treasure  
Should be spent  
For such a transitory  
Spin around that pole.  
It might be like flying.  
The thing she liked to try  
At night with eyes closed.  
Imaginings: the freedom of wings  
And birds.  
"I want a ticket,"  
She mumbled, still uncertain.  
He yawned, summer hot and bored,  
Tore one red transport to heaven  
Loose and shoved it at  
Pug nose and green.  
The sticky treasures irked his hand.  
He treated them like she might treat  
A wooly worm--  
With measured pokes  
And long distance disapproval.  
He edged them to the cash box  
Where they gaily stuck  
To brother coins.

The wings ticket felt silly  
In her hands  
Accustomed to nice sticky metal.  
The thin red paper wasn't strong,  
Didn't slide and didn't seem  
Befitting of a key to flight.  
He (another one this time)  
Was busy bolting playsuited  
Cottoned human beings

Into wing chairs.  
She (knee-high) was waiting  
Patiently, at first,  
Then uneasy as his blank side  
Never stopped at her green lights  
Or noticed her extended  
(Flight anxious) red paper.  
A motor noise began  
And playsuits splashed  
A patchwork rainbow  
In the air  
Carnival wheel  
On a silly lighted stick.  
She watched from wide green  
But the blank  
Was puffing on a silly lighted  
Stick (smaller.)

He (the other one)  
Was leaning on a radio  
Hot and bored and dreaming  
When that nose came poking  
At the booth.  
The green was looking at the ground.  
Red came crumpled through  
"What? Don't you want it?"  
"No." she said.  
And dropped her fuzzy head  
Below the nose level  
Sad.  
"But, kid, don't you want your money?"

She watched as playsuited birds  
Came crashing earthward  
Happy--chattering loud.  
Her sticky treasure bought the knowing  
Flying wouldn't be as good  
On a silly lighted stick.





Still Life with Apples and Oranges

Jerri Lynn Knipp



## PAUL'S WEDDING

Roberta Webster

Everyone thought that Paul would never get married; but he did. I was there. Randy was there. Mark was there. A nice lady named Kay the organist was there. Actually, "the organist" is not part of her name, but in my mind last names get blurred and sometimes I have to count on music to tie the first name of anyone to my memory. Those people who don't play instruments, or sing, or think they can play instruments, or sing float about aimlessly in my memory without last names. Paul is a think-he-can singer, a damn good guitarist, and a decent songwriter. He's also my friend of many high school rock bands and college coffee house years. He married Sherry, who had no last name that I can recall until she married Paul the musician.

I was there to sing. That's my last name and first name and probably my middle name in my mind. My other name is Sam, short for Samantha, and I am ever deluged with incredulous replies--"Your name is Sam? That's a boy's name!" So if it's all the same to you I'd just as soon stick with the "I" that I obviously have to use to tell this story with any kind of cohesion. So I (Sam, Singer, Self) was there to see Paul the musician through what I assumed would be his shakiest of days.

I arrived at the church one half hour early in the panic that always overtakes me when I must sing at a wedding. Randy, friend of the family, reel-to-reel sound man, blonde giant, scooted me in the door with gentlemanly promptness. Blind panic riveted my eyes to the destination: the obscure chair behind the candelabra behind the organ that was to hide me until "the crucial moment," that time when all eyes and ears in the church would be on me and, if I didn't die, I would produce sweet sounds that would set the mood for the meaningful occasion to follow. I galloped, my horsiness never ceases to embarrass me,



to the chair where to my horror roosted a corsage. (Oh, Lord! I'll never get it on in front of all those people!) So, I plopped down and as gracefully as possible held the corsage in my palm like a contact lens. I remained in that relaxed position for nearly twenty minutes, as I was uncharacteristically early and characteristically scared.

Fear is a strange thing with me. Someone who is a singer, by name and trade, should logically not hate singing. I do in a way. Actually, I hate to be afraid, because it makes me do ridiculous things. Singing makes me afraid, so I guess I hate singing. But since singing is the one thing I do that isn't ridiculous, I should love it. And I do. But it scares me. Fear has no logic to it. For instance, I am frightened to death of my driveway at home and will run like hell to the door as soon as I get near that gaping abyss. I've tried joking about it, and I often refer to "the monsters in the driveway" in an effort to rid myself of that gripping fear forever. But they're always not there each time I pass the driveway in the dark, and I always run like hell as though they were right behind me.

By the time Kay the organist smiled at me to signal my turn in the spectacle, those driveway monsters were all over the church grinning like Cheshire cats in pink hats, blue suits, baby dresses, and ushers' tuxedos. They were all around me and I could only shake. I shook all the way through the first song, though Randy told me later that he thought the shaking was my natural vibrato--which I have almost none of. As I vibrated back to my seat, Kay the organist smiled at me like the good witch Glenda and broke into "Misty" on the organ. The driveway monsters dissolved into memories of bourbon-happy times with the jazz combo I sing with. I fairly floated down onto the seat as the corsage easily found its way to a resting place on the organ. The honeyed sounds of Good Witch Glenda poured thickly on my head till I felt straight-toned smooth like Nancy Wilson.

Come the second song, I was piping like a saxophone. Good Witch Glenda smiled with a great deal more than sympathy, then crescendoed into the Wedding March. In came Paul, strutting

like someone from a Mardi Gras parade. His small grinning self was contrasted effectively with Mark's tall, dark, and shaking best man guise. Paul was clearly co-star of the wedding. The other star flew in with a white flurry as the march intensified to forte. Two of them grinning, confident, and completely ignorant of driveway monsters.

Randy shifted his six feet-plus frame behind some pillars to better hide himself from the tirades of relatives who were gauging their ways to cake and punch. "Can you believe this? Weddings. I always hate the phoniness afterwards. If, and I say if I ever get married, I will invite no relatives. Just close friends. And none of this church stuff either. I think I'll just get married in Eden Park by the lake. You want some of this stuff, Madam?" he said, pointing to the cake.

"Aw, we can wait till the line gets smaller. People are still going through the receiving line."

We--Randy and I--were facing the backs of the wedding party, playing Walter Cronkite and Rona Barrett, or any other observer, subjective or otherwise.

"Your song was delightful my dear...yes, beautiful,...very good...do you do this all the time...well, I haven't seen you in years...I so enjoyed your singing...a fine voice...." Several unidentified persons passed by me in a swirl of compliments and I could no more discern their individual beings than I could grab a unique plastic fish at the Fair's swiftly moving fish pond. I responded with stock blushes and half-muttered answers to each fish.

Randy bowed nobly from the waist, kissing my hand. "And before anymore of your admirers swoop in, may I commission you in advance to sing at my funeral. I even have a catchy little dirge picked out."

"You know what I want at my wedding?" I interrupted his attempt to recite the lyrics; he was puzzling his blonde brow



in a polite effort at interest.

"NO, what do you want at your wedding?" He delivered it easily with gentlemanly concern.

"Well, first off, if it ever happens, I'd like someone to sing "Life is a Carnival" and "You Can't Always Get What You Want." Then maybe a big stageband to play "Ain't Misbehavin'" with a stand up sax section: the works!"

"Yeah, all right! Or maybe you could just elope."

"Naw, no gifts."

"You're right."

Paul and Sherry stopped their vigorous handshaking and greeting long enough to exchange smiles and a warm kiss.

"But you know, Randy, I think this is the first wedding I've been to where the bride and groom didn't look shell shocked immediately after. You know. That look of 'Why did I do this?' I mean, they actually look happy, like they know what they're here for."

"That's encouraging, anyway. But I doubt if that'll influence me."

"Me either."

I noticed that Kay the organist was quietly slipping out the back door. Odd, I thought, since she seemed so gay and friendly. I muttered something to her about hope I see you again. For once, I meant it. I found out later that her husband was an invalid. Then her good-witch smiles and her feel for "Misty" were clear to me.

"All single girls up to catch the bouquet!" A round-faced photographer was playing ringmaster to the human circus. Blushing,

eager-faced teenagers and dried, near matrons jumped to their feet and into the seething circle.

"Goin', Sam?" Randy nudged me sarcastically. It was almost a dare.

"Yeah, Sam. You fit the bill." This cynical reminder was punctuated by a jab from my left side on which sat Mark, the best man, conga player, part-time heartache.

"I will not do that. It's sexist, it's silly!"

Mark winced, "Hold her back before she gets violent and burns her bra."

"And besides, I'll never get married."

The camera focuses, the flowers go up along with several squeals, and arms shoot out in all directions. A thrilled relative of the bride holds her flower-filled hands in disbelief, "Oh, I don't believe it!" (She has to tell us.) Knowing relatives nod at some scrawny, shy lad across the way to whom the lass is engaged. Giggles abound. The same anywhere.

"All right, fellas. It's your chance now." The same depressingly cheerful photographer. I suspect they're all secretly exhibitionists, or better, sneering voyeurs. They catch our eyes closed or our mouths opened ridiculously, and they love every revealing moment. That's it--they have a fool fetish.

The tall dark savage on my left huddled in his seat as though his tux might suddenly melt into some inconspicuous blue suit. Too late. Once best man, best man for the duration.

"Come on, Mark, your turn," I returned a careful jab. Mark was sore in spots one had to poke to find.

"I won't do that," he mocked, "it's sexist!"



"You have to; you're the best man, and even I'll testify to it."

But he was already up at the urgings of other wedding party members.

The camera focuses. Stragglers are thrown into place by fiancees, steadies, and mothers. Most heads are studying dusty shoe tips. The same corny jokes are made about the bride's legs and the groom feigns jealousy. Up and out goes the garter, usually clinging stubbornly to someone who welcomes it like the plague. Knowing relatives nod at some plump lass who is giggling feverishly at the sidelines. Some poor guy is scarlet. Rerun.

Only this film jumped the reel and Mark was the unsuspecting butt of the joke. Randy and I howled on the sidelines in place of the usual giggling nymphomaniac. Never had fate chosen so unlikely a target. Mark, stunned and silent, wandered back to his seat, but at the last minute chose to sit in a seat far to the end of the row. Away from me.

"Don't worry, I don't want you." I was giggling uncontrollably. "I have more respect for my sanity."

A silent reply. Hurt? You never know with heart-breakers.

At the second reception the heart-breaker became dark and brooding. He raced us all to the bar, then made off to a quiet corner with his own private bottle of champagne. I couldn't tell exactly what was bothering him, but the garter was shoved grudgingly in his tux pocket. Just a few stray threads of lace in his otherwise somber appearance screamed garter. The maid of honor, a somewhat faded brunette who appeared to be slightly uncomfortable with the whole party, wandered off to Mark's corner where she scooted obviously near to the pouting savage. He must've looked like a haven to her in all the whirling celebration. She eyed him with a look that made me feel sorry for her. I've seen the same humiliating look on the face of my dog many times. (No

connotation intended.) That compromising look any self-respecting dog gives as he sacrifices his pride to get what he needs. Even cats, independent as they are claimed to be, will do a dance when it comes to this. It was pure, unabashed hunger. It's funny how domesticated animals will squirm, for a time anyway, over something any normal wild animal would take. I felt sorry for the maid of honor since she was dealing with wildlife--at the moment brooding and wounded--on open, tail-wagging terms.

A second reception is something Baptists have when they don't want to be considered sinful by their fellow church members. The first reception features cake, punch, bouquet, garter, cake-cutting, a quick exit, and it lasts every bit of fifteen to twenty minutes. The second reception stars booze, features food, and maybe music of some kind with a special added subtraction--no minister. This reception lasts till the booze runs out and the last slobbering guest falls out the door to find his car slightly dented from departures. Catholics and Jews and many Protestants usually have the whole reception in one big sha-bang; however, knowing how bent Baptists are toward division (Southern Baptists, Northern Baptists, Independent Baptists, Free Will Baptists, capital, ETC.), I guess two receptions make for good Baptist logic.

Randy was elated at the second reception. Drunken people make excellent complacent listeners, and Rand was taking advantage of the situation. As I wandered toward the basement in search of my third bourbon and coke, I found him lecturing to three beer-soaked relatives on the virtues of scotch as the drink of a true gentleman. They were all trying, gentlemanly, to listen, but their buggy, forced-open eyes and frequent belches betrayed them for what they were. Randy was undaunted. He ignored the belches as a veteran teacher ignores a stray paper wad.

Two bourbons and several congratulations on "a fine voice" later, I returned to the vicinity of the lecture and the incidentally-near Mark's corner. Two of Randy's victims had escaped out the front door in search of dented cars, while the liveliest one had appointed himself life of the party and was



tripping about slurrishly announcing that he was "just making rounds." Randy had turned his non-stop opinions on Mark and the maid of honor.

"Not really a bad wedding, as weddings go," Randy announced before he finished his carefully nursed scotch with one gentlemanly swig. "Smooth stuff."

"Oh, God!" Mark moaned and cradled his curly dark mop in his hands, "Oh, God!" He repeated arms outstretched and head back so that he nearly cracked it on the fireplace behind him.

"What's wrong?" The bridesmaid leaned motherly near to touch Mark's arm which now defiantly sported the garter, bartender style.

"Nothing." He began to giggle uncontrollably with inflected screams of "Nothing!" It was clear to me that he was in a much better mood, or at least a drunker one. But that poor hungry maid of honor thought that he had flipped out and was bravely trying to calm him. He pinched her ass and she jumped to her feet--white, then red.

"Why, you're just teasing." She smiled weakly and sat back down hungrier than ever from the promise of contact.

"Paul's really married," moaned Mark. He snapped his garter and giggled, sipped his booze and moaned.

"Yes," said Randy only too glad to have a new subject opened for his comment. "I'm afraid we're going to have to face the fact."

"Well, it would be a lot easier to face after a few good beers! That stuff downstairs is piss water and these bubbles are eating my stomach." Mark tossed his empty champagne glass into the fake fireplace. Fortunately for us the glass was fake too. "Damn it! Plastic! Can't even raise a little hell."

The bridesmaid was paling as Mark showed her for all time that he was no tail-wagger. He dropped his hand hard on her upper thigh and dug in. Someone came in to relieve her embarrassment announcing that her boyfriend was there to pick her up. She gave Mark one last hopeful look, but he refused to turn into anything approaching domestic hunger. When she had excused herself Mark was loudly asking Randy where he could find some women.

When everything was quieter, Mark, Randy, and I were debating what to do next. Mark was still in favor of finding some beer and some women, in that order. I was still drunk enough to want to drink more even though it was one-thirty, and I could no longer say anything without repeating.

"Paul's really married," I announced.

"You just said that," Randy groaned.

"Oh," I couldn't remember if I had or not, but I was too drunk to argue, so I flopped back, drink in hand and spilling.

"Sam's drunk." Mark pronounced this very carefully so as not to be counter-charged.

I was incited. "Look who's talkin'." This was all very slurred.

Just then Paul and Sherry walked in to Randy's whistling rendition of that famous chorus from "Lohengrin" "Here comes the, etc."

"We have something for you, Mark." Paul stood grinning devilishly, hands behind him.

"And you, Sam." Sherry grinned and stood likewise.

"Hold out your hands and close your eyes," Paul commanded.



I obeyed but I thought my eyes just might stay that way for good. I opened them heavily to Mark's screaming.

"What the hell do you mean by that? Je-sus!"

I opened one iron-clad eye far enough to see a little silver ring on my left hand. Mark was screaming about an identical band on his left hand.

"And how long is this supposed to last?" I tried for some sophisticated cynicism, but it sounded more like plain old bewilderment.

"For tonight only." Mark leaned lecherously forward and threatened to pinch me.

"The honeymoon's over!" I laughed and fled for the kitchen where I stayed pinned to the wall for several minutes by the bulky food line. Several hungry guests bumped me and the silver band slipped from my hand. An older guest apologized excessively and went down on his wobbly knees to help me retrieve it. It took me minutes to convince him to get back on his feet, and longer to assure him that the ring was just a cake decoration.

Randy intervened finally and sent the man wobbling on his way.

"Thanks," I sighed, much sobered by the exertion.

"I guess we'd better leave. Mark is near explosion. He just can't wait to raise some hell."

We grabbed our coats from the rice-covered ruins and faced the reality of the cold air.

"I lost my ring," I said to Mark as we neared Randy's car.

He gave me a strange look and said to Randy, "On to adventure!"

The only bar open that time of night was in South Newport. It was a small hole-in-the-wall bar run by Italians who sat there grumbling each night about how they used to run all of Newport before those law-happy Baptists went on the warpath against gambling. We saw the sign that flashed "Picadillo's... Picadillo's...Picadillo's" as a forewarning to anyone who didn't like bingo or pasta that he was indeed out of bounds.

Mark, Randy, and I were convinced by the cocky way we felt and the snappy way we were dressed that we must be members of the Mafia. So we sailed into Picadillos on the wings of brotherhood, Mark first, Godfather-like in his tux.

The Italians in Picadillos didn't look like Italians. They didn't talk like Italians. And what was worse, they didn't recognize us as fellow Italians although I was quite sure my blood had turned to tomato sauce. Mark was sizing the room up for a massacre, and Randy was doing his best to look at least like an adopted organization member. There were seven or eight slightly burly men with burr haircuts and a skinny barmaid with wrinkles that said she was at least forty. She could've been my mother or any other Baptist from my community. Despite our dry entrance, we bellied up to the bar in expectation.

Mark began a conversation with the man to the left of him explaining why he had a garter on his arm, and we ordered beers. Of course Randy interrupted to say he'd have scotch because that was a true gentleman's drink. The barmaid snarled and that's when the trouble began.

I was vaguely aware of someone down at the end of the bar staring at us. That made me even cockier because standing in the middle of these two very different, very tall men, I felt like a gun moll, or at least a little brother. I would fight for my gang.

"If you ask me them sissies ought to go where there's other ones of their kind. Girls. Three girls." One of the blurs at the end of the bar was grumbling.



Randy smiled a little nervously. "Maybe we ought to go."

Mark ignored him and ordered another beer for me. Our Godfather was protecting his family. He smiled at the grumbler and raised his beer in salute. The strength of Mark's monsterless gall had spread to me and I did the same.

The grumbler was infuriated. "Damn smart-assed sissies. Just as filthy as they come." He was getting louder and the place was getting quieter.

I leaned on Mark's shoulder to further assert his masculinity to our adversary. I grinned shamelessly.

The grumbler could take no more and began to move toward us. Randy edged toward the door. It became clear that the grumbler was owner of the place as he shouted orders to the barmaid.

"You all just about finished here?" He leered across the bar at us only.

"Could I have another beer for the road?" asked Mark, leaning threateningly across the bar. I broadened my grin. Randy choked.

"No!" said the grumbler quickly and turned his back.

The place fell dead silent, except for Randy's knees.

Our Godfather adjusted the garter on his sleeve meticulously and said slowly, "I don't believe I heard you correctly."

Dead silence and more knees, Italian.

"What kind of beer do you want?"

Sighs of relief all around as our Godfather and their Godfather grin in understanding. Mark took his beer and we were

off into the night, adventure over.

We laughed nervously all the way home and rediscussed the incident dramatically, padding where reality let us down. Mark and Randy fell silent after awhile, but I chattered on in my head about the outrageous Mark and his freedom from driveway monsters. I knew Randy suffered from monsters that grumble.

Our Godfather was smugly enjoying his victory when I impulsively gurgled that I loved him. The things I say when I'm drunk. It was just a bourbon-induced, beer-enforced expression of affection. But it hit the Godfather like a sawed-off shotgun. He huddled near the car door surrounded by driveway monsters of his own special making. I recognized his look of fear from my own identified monsters. His were harder to define, and I could see that he didn't want to be faced with them. He pulled the garter from his arm and huddled tighter.

"I'm sorry," I said sliding out of the car. "Take care of him, Randy." Randy cocked his head in surprise. It was dark and he couldn't see Mark's face.

"O.K.," he laughed and they drove off.

My own monsters were waiting for me in the driveway, but I was too rowdy with bourbon to run from them. "Paul's really married," I said right to them. They snorted and rolled off to sleep.



## A STORY-LETTER

Anne Shelby

242 West Chestnut Street  
London, Kentucky 40351  
April 4, 1974

Dear Dianne--

And how are you these strange days? Hope you got over the thing with your parents and that all is quiet at least on that front (nice to have just one quiet front)....

Rating myself on a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being "totally freaked," 10 being "coping well," I'd average out around 2½. A capsule analysis follows, in the areas of:

- (1) marriage
- (2) motherhood
- (3) career
- (4) friends
- (5) fatness

(At least I am organized)--I am not coping in a very orderly and organized way--NO FREEDOM, EVEN IN INSANITY? (that was good--add to my list of things to write heavy poems about) I have these lists--everywhere--organized, constantly updated, numbered according to priority LISTS of things to worry about. (Everything is always spelled correctly on my lists and nothing is abbreviated--I'm not the kind of person who abbreviates things, are you? I don't even like to abbreviate the names of states, but people think you're really weird if you don't do that (Are you always afraid people are going to stand around in a circle and point and laugh at you?) I can hear it at the

post office--

"Hey Joe, did you see this? Some dumbass wrote out 'Connecticut'--the whole goddamn word-C-O-N-N-E...the whole bit. Can you believe that?"

Then you start writing out things like District of Columbia and the numbers of the zip code (two oh two oh two) oh oh.

I bought a card file and some index cards to make notes for my great American novel--I read that writers are supposed to do that--but I've used up all the note cards making lists of things to worry about. And grocery lists, which are arranged by location of item in the store: bread, margarine, cheese, milk, peanut butter, catsup, tuna, pineapple canned in its own juice. Why did I major in English? I'm a frustrated librarian. I'm a frustrated English major. I'm a frustrated lister. And all that was by way of introduction to (1) marriage.

Marriage. (note use of side heading) What can you say about a 25 year old girl who gets married twice? You could say she's insecure. You could say she's consistent. You could say she's (happy and liberated) (happy and unliberated) (unhappy and liberated) (unhappy and unliberated). You could say many things, but there's only one thing of which you can be sure: she is not a fast learner.

Pete and I have really gotten into the old marriage thing again, despite lengthy speeches about overcoming sexist conditioning and relating to each other as free human beings. And I get mad if he doesn't take out the garbage and he scowls if dinner isn't ready by the time Walter Cronkite says that's the way it is. (I haven't heard the news since Wounded Knee--whatever happened?) We read Open Marriage, of course, and The Joy of Sex--in spite of the fact that they were best sellers--and agreed we were very unliberated (we were couple B--the ones who sounded like Hayden and Fonda and acted like Ozzie and



Harriet). We identified, defined, and expounded upon our various hang-ups (do people still say hang-ups?), tracing their origins and reinforcements and analyzing their relationships to other hang-ups and their manifestations in daily events and why didn't I do something with my hair.

As for sex, I can't believe I could have been so liberated before marriage and so liberated after--NO--so liberated before and so unliberated after--Is there sex after marriage? We'll have to discuss this the next time I come to the District of Columbia...Have you been able to find a good book on the female orgasm? The sources I've read disagree among themselves (why can't people get along the way they used to?) so I don't know what/how many/when to have. It's very depressing. Which brings us interestingly enough to (2) motherhood.

(2) Motherhood. Bryan has now reached the grande olde age of three, and is growing so fast I can't keep him in training pants. He is very bright, of course, but I really worry about the kind of conditioning he's getting at the day care center. (It's not really a day care center but I like to call it that). The ladies there are not exactly up on what is now known about child care. (They trusted Dr. Spock once but never again).

Bryan said, "When I get big I'm going to be a doctor."

I said, "Okay." Of course I'm never pushy.

He said, "Laura is going to be a nurse."

I said, "Why can't Laura be a doctor?"

He said, "Because she's a g-u-u-r-r-l-l-uh."

I breastfed the kid while reading Germaine Greer and he says this to me when he's three years old. I could have killed him.

And he's learning VIOLENCE at the day care center, too, Dianne. How to shoot a roomful of people with a machine gun (he uses the little broom I gave him), how to sound like a siren, how to handcuff prisoners. And I wanted him to be a



poet. He's such a cutie, though, when he comes up, face covered with sand and jelly, and says, "Mommie, can I have a drink of water?" I don't know if I'll have another one or not.

(3) Career. My career is really going well. I can now type about 300 words per minute, and everyone agrees I'm a whiz with the telephone. The only problem is I never wanted to be a secretary. None of the secretaries I know ever wanted to be secretaries. Teachers, lawyers, doctors, writers, even mothers, maybe, but not secretaries. The people who wanted to be secretaries got married the summer after high school graduation and got pregnant before they finished business college. It's all their fault. Somewhere there's a person who wanted to be a secretary, and I have her job. There's no justice in the world. Of course it isn't permanent. Someday somebody will want to pay \$50,000 a year for an employee who was valedictorian of her high school class, took piano for six years, majored in English at a small private college, and whose hobbies are reading, playing piano, and looking at her old high school yearbook. Until then I'm protesting by not shaving my legs.

(4) Then there's Friends. The bad thing about friends is they write you and say they've moved to California or had a baby or gotten married or gone vegetarian or Jesus-freak or straight or to their sister's for the summer and you lose their address and then GUILT: "Did I lose that address because I can't handle a relationship with this person? Because I have always been jealous of/ in love with/ threatened by this person?" The more persistent keep writing anyway, like Renee, who just got a grant to study in London next year and is still living with the photographer "a really beautiful relationship," she said. She sent a picture, which looked like she'd started wearing makeup and bras again. It was very depressing.

(5) Like Fatness. I have been extremely diet-conscious lately, and rightfully so, having reached an all-time high weight exceeded only by my weight the last time I went to the obstetrician in pregnant clothes. Jean Nidetch, Dr. Stillman,



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## THE DISCOVERY

Gary A. Light

Jason Meeks stepped solemnly up to the pulpit for the morning announcements. After the opportunities of service during the week had been mentioned and the sick of Turberville remembered, he said, "I have one final announcement. I have been invited to preach the Race Relations Day sermon at Bethel Baptist Church. I am sure all of you are invited to attend, and I hope you will all take advantage of what could be a momentous occasion in our town's history." Jason saw the all-white congregation quickly nod together in small groups, smiling and whispering. It was good that the idea excited them so much.

After the service, Sam Johnson came to Jason at the back door to shake his hand. "Don't worry about preaching at that black church, I don't think it will cause any trouble." Watching his deacon walk on down the steps, Jason smiled--of course there should be no trouble. After all, they did invite me.

However, for the next two weeks Jason did worry about the service--what should I wear, what should I say, how should I act? Finally, he decided to wear his best dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie. He had heard that the congregation was large, conservative, and critical of most white preachers. He had heard from white folks, and he was going to look like what white folks said black folks wanted, and he was going to preach like the white folks said the black folks were used to, and he was going to act like the hope for unity he felt he was.

At ten till one Jason pulled into Bethel's parking lot. He was surprised at the number of cars already there, and the cloud of yellow dust told him that more were arriving. Jason walked up to the building; it needed painting. Inside, he met Deacon Jones, Brother Washington, and Rev. Brown. They shook



hands and acknowledged that it was hot. It always was in August. Then Jason was led to his place on the platform and the service began. Jason had never seen so many people at a church in Turberville, but no one there belonged to First Baptist, no one there was white. He was all alone. The pews were packed and some people even sat in the open windows. Already he could smell the crowd in the heat, and he knew that this was going to be long, and that this was going to be hard.

Songs. For over an hour they had sung and taken up offerings. "Not enough, yet," Rev. Brown had said and the plates were passed around again. Songs. They prayed, not in any order, but in noisy confusion around the room. They sang and prayed and gave without paying the slightest attention to one another. Each person seemed to think he was at his own House of the Lord. The deacons began their part of the service, Deacon Jones preached his own sermon while Brother Washington played his banjo to shouts and dancing people who tumbled into the aisles. Joyful joyful shouts, celebration, offerings, prayers, and songs. The crowd began to hum with excitement and expectation. Emotion swelled, and caught by the rafters, began to infect the balcony. More stood to preach in their seats to a private congregation, and others offered new prayers. Jason thought of Babel. It was already a quarter to three.

Rev. Brown stood in the pulpit and over the noise spoke of the guest speaker. Order came to chaos and Jason found that indeed he was in church and he was to preach and be heard. He bowed his head a moment before he took the pulpit. Then he began his sermon, the way he had rehearsed it. "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly. You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. Our Jesus, our Lord Jesus, has set us free from all the prison houses. We are free to go; free to become. Slaves no longer, we are His. The sins of Babylon can't hold us any longer, we are freed by the Resurrected Lamb. We won't be seduced by Satan again! We have been freed from the chains of flesh, the bonds of guilt, and the false run arrounds of life. People don't control us any longer, for we belong to the Lord Jesus,

we are His."

He was just beginning and a woman lifted her hands and began to tremble; Jason noticed. She was about fifty, well overweight, and she wore a sleeveless, faded cotton dress. She trembled, rocked, and began to hum, "Mmmmmmmmm, he's good, mmmm."

Jason smiled and preached louder. The woman said it again, clearly and unmistakably, "He's GOOD!" and the others in the congregation agreed, "Yes, yes, Mmmmmmm, yes."

As the calls increased, Jason's sermon got louder and faster. In more detail he described the prisons people are trapped into without Christ. And always that woman would raise her hands and hum aloud, "Mmmmmmm, he's good." More often came the refrain, "Mmmmmmm, yes, yes, he is good."

These shouts followed the path of Jason's sermon as he led them to the depths of despair and darkness without hope in the prisons. His finding Jesus to be the key to the prison door was met with the woman's call, "He's good, mmmmmmm, he is good."

Jason smiled again and told of the joys of freedom and Brother Washington began to dance in the aisle, hysterically clicking his tongue as if to the rhythm of an unheard African drum.

Jason began to slow down, but was urged on by more and more people taking up the cry, "Mmmmmmm, he's good, he is GOOD!" He preached there might be a chance that he could get the blacks and whites together because he was able to preach to both groups. He preached about the end of all slavery, about equality, and about true love and concern. He was answered by the woman, "MMMMMMM, HE IS GOOD!"

Then Jason told of the judgement, the gathering of the saints, and Jesus, the key that opened the prison doors, would also open the gates of Heaven. There was more acknowledgment,



"He is good, mmmmm, he's good." Jason knew he could not go on, and he had already impressed the congregation, so he whispered out the end of his sermon, satisfied that he had done a good job. As he breathed the last word the woman stood, both hands high in the air, and trembled and shouted, "Mmmmmmm, he's good, he is good, the Lord, HE IS GOOD, the Lord is good, mmmmmmm."

"Yes," answered the people, "yes, He is GOOD."

After the prayer Jason was taken to the back of the church with Rev. Brown. The people filed out, shaking his hand-- "'joyed it, brother"--and calling out to one another--"John, John, wait up!"

The minister of the church invited Jason to stay for the church supper and motioned to the tables lined with food beside the church. Jason saw the platters of chicken and ham, the bowls overflowing with vegetables, the biscuits, the desserts, and he saw the little groups of black people, their heads bent, busy with laughter. He shook his head, "No," and mumbled something about Training Union. Then he went to his car and drove out of the parking lot toward Turberville. He did not look back.





Untitled

Marty E. Hinson



A SECRET

Robin Stigall

In 1968 Haldeman reverted back to what it had always been-- a small, unknown town. The brickyard had finally closed down, unable to meet strikers' demands, and the people who had lived there because of the brickyard now left for the same reason. My family had just moved to Haldeman, so I hadn't seen the former prosperity of the town. The large buildings were still standing, but they were empty and the windows were broken; the beautiful public gardens were still landscaped, but the flowers were dead or dying; and the people still lived in fine houses, while they bordered on bankruptcy. The departure of the brickyard affected the townspeople economically, but it also affected them emotionally. Those remaining drew closer together, shutting out unreliable outsiders. It was as though an unwritten, unspoken agreement existed between each of them to keep to themselves and to depend on no one outside the town.

The people were friendly enough to my mother, who was a native of Haldeman, although she had lived in Ohio since childhood. The church members welcomed her on Sundays, but they never came to visit us. My parents didn't seem to mind; they were wrapped up in each other, the house, and their jobs. I was the only child and I was accustomed to city blocks full of kids. When Kathy Harris started being friendly toward me, everything seemed to look a little brighter. I soon realized that her problem was the same as mine, we were both lonely and we were both outsiders. Kathy was an outsider because of her father, John Paul; he was the town drunk. Not only was he a drunk, he was "different" and the town held this to be the worse crime of all. John Paul was one of the few men to walk out of a Nazi concentration camp, and he was the only man in Haldeman to be decorated for bravery. The town welcomed John Paul with open arms, but he left the train station while the

high school band was playing and the people were cheering. The town never forgave him.

John Paul and Sara Harris had six children in nine years. Three were born retarded, one was stillborn. The town blamed John Paul; he was "different." He had let the war twist him inside. Sara accepted the children calmly; they were a burden she had to bear and she was determined to do it. Five years of caring for three children who would always be babies, convinced her that she needed help. After all, a person could only bear so much. The governor was giving a re-election speech in a nearby city and Sara went to see him. All the newspapers carried Sara's picture with the governor; they both had tears streaming down their faces while they smiled bravely. The children were admitted to an institute for the retarded in Frankfort; Sara began housecleaning in the city for some of the governor's rich friends; and the governor won the election by a landslide.

Sara's job reminded the townspeople of John Paul's other cardinal sin; he didn't have to work for a living. John Paul received a Veterans' pension and a Social Security disability pension. The sight of John Paul fishing, hunting, or drinking at Moore's store filled the townspeople with helpless fury.

"You would think that while she's working so hard, he could at least stay home and help with the kids."

"He'll never do anything but lay around drunk."

"There oughta be a law against the likes of him!"

"They say his mind just comes and goes."

"Somethin's wrong with him all right. Why he wouldn't even come to his own welcome home party. And why did the war change him anyway, it never changed anybody else around here. There musta been somethin' wrong with him all along."



"Well, one things for shore, there's somethin' wrong with him now."

Sara woke the entire family at 5:30, even though Kathy and Billy, the baby of the family, didn't catch the bus until 7:45. Before Kathy left for school, she had cooked breakfast, washed the dishes, made the beds, picked up clothes, cleaned the bathroom, swept the kitchen, helped Billy get ready, and sometimes she did a load of wash. In the afternoons, before Sara came home, she dust mopped all the floors and dusted the furniture. On weekends she mopped and waxed, washed windows, and washed and ironed all the clothes. Sara expected every job to be done perfectly. I once watched her tear the bedspread and blankets off a bed to see if the sheet was on right.

The house was Sara's greatest joy. It crowned the highest hill in Haldeman like a jewel. Its brick walls rose two stories high. Ancient oak trees spread their limbs over its roof, and vines clung to the edges of the broad window sills. When I saw the inside, I remembered pictures I'd seen in Beautiful Homes and Gardens. The rooms were all huge with high ceilings and big windows. The hardwood floors gleamed like polished gold, with the light from the windows dancing upon them. The furniture was old and a little worn, but that only added to the beauty. The entire house was a showcase of the loveliest things I'd ever seen. I didn't see all of the house very often; I usually stayed on the enclosed back porch, which Sara had made into a family room. Kathy, Billy, and John Paul spent most of their time on the porch, so the house would stay clean. Everyone kept their shoes on the back porch, because Sara didn't want the hardwood floors marred. Nobody ever wore shoes in the house, but Sara usually had newspapers spread all through the house for people to walk on. Every person in Haldeman envied Sara's beautiful house.

That summer a revival tidal wave hit Haldeman. As the temperature climbed, the preaching and singing reached feverish pitches. Scores of people were saved in the white, one-room church, and Sara was one of the first. Kathy and John Paul

were saved, too, but no one took them seriously. John Paul began drinking a week after he was baptized, but Kathy continued going to church. She seemed to be happier, so I asked her how it all happened. We were upstairs sitting on my bed, eating melted M&M's and drinking lukewarm Kool-Aid.

"You shoulda been there, Carrie; everyone is so nice and friendly," Kathy bubbled, squeezing my pillow against her chest. "They all shake your hand and smile."

"That's a change for most of 'em," I muttered.

Kathy ignored my remark. "The best part was when the preacher started his sermon, and everybody--"

"What's the preacher's name?" I interrupted.

"I don't know," she said impatiently, "It doesn't matter. Shut up and let me tell you what happened. You asked me to tell you."

"Okay, Okay. I won't say another word," I promised.

"I was sittin' by the aisle in the back when he starts preachin'. After a few minutes, I noticed a lot of people are lookin' at me. Then it hit me, he was preachin' to me!"

"Oh, Kathy, why would he do that?"

"Because, stupid, I was the only sinner there. They always preach to the sinners. Why would he waste his preachin' on Christians, they're already saved," she explained disgustedly.

"Well anyway," she continued after a minute, "He walked down the aisle giving alter call, until he stood right in front of me. Then he reached over and held out his hand to me."

"Wow," I said, finally getting interested, "What did you do?"



"I walked with him up to the alter and then he prayed for me and I repented all my sins."

"That's it?"

"God Carrie, whadda you expect? That man prayed for me, just me. He really cared about me. I think that's somethin' pretty darn special!"

"Yeah I guess it is," I agreed. "Well anyway Sara will hafta stop nagging you about church now."

"Sara never stops naggin', Carrie, you should know that by now."

"You can't please some people, Kathy. That's just the way they are."

Kathy got up off the bed and walked to the mirror above my dresser. She picked up a comb and ran it through her hair. "You know somethin', I can't ever remember pleasin' Sara. Not once, not one time in my whole life. No matter what I do, it turns out wrong." She took a deep breath and I could see her blinking her eyes in the mirror. She turned around and smiled, "Let's go to the store and get a Coke, that Kool-Aid is makin' me sick."

"Yeah," I answered, "I'm kinda sick myself."

After the preacher who saved her left that winter, Kathy's interest in church steadily declined. John Paul gave up any claims to being religious, and settled down to serious drinking. I saw him one evening at Moore's store, sitting in the rocking chair by the coal stove. He called me Kathy, when I came into the store. I just laughed, figuring it was some kind of joke. When I walked by him, he reached over and pinched me hard on the behind. That's when I realized he was blind drunk. I walked on passed him, but he got up and followed me around the store, trying to kiss me, until George Moore made him sit down in the

rocker. John Paul stumbled back to the chair and passed out cold.

"He thought I was Kathy," I told George.

"He's jus drunk. Don't pay him no mind." George replied, studying a hole in the linoleum covered counter.

"But why'd he bother me like that?" I asked, wondering why George avoided looking at me.

"Don't ask so many fool questions, girl. Ya might find out more then ya wanna know."

About a week later, Kathy asked me to stay overnight with her on her birthday. Dinner was ready when I got there, that Saturday evening. Sara had fixed hot ham for the dinner, but I thought it would be cold before she finished praying. Sara never stopped talking. After a few unsuccessful attempts at conversation, I let her have the floor. She rambled on gossiping, quoting worn Bible phrases, until she got around to her favorite subject: backsliders.

"I'd be afraid to backslide. I'd be afraid the Lord would strike me down. I just wouldn't tempt the Lord like that, I'd be afraid to." Sara looked at John Paul while she spoke. He continued cutting his ham. Nobody spoke.

"I'd be afraid the Lord would punish me through my children. Some people don't think the Lord will do that. But he will." Sara gripped the table edge and leaned forward, "A person who'd backslide is weak. Weak in faith, weak in the word of God. They're cowards. They have no faith in the Lord, in his word." Sara was almost screaming. John Paul put down his knife and looked at Sara for the first time since she started talking.

"Sara, if you Christians know the word of God so good, why are you eatin' ham?" Sara looked at him like he was crazy.



"The Bible plainly says not to eat the flesh of an animal with a cloven hoof, unless it chews a cud." He explained calmly, then added, "I never saw a pig chewin' a cud." We burst out laughing; Sara sat back in her chair.

"You should read the Bible sometimes, Sara, instead of singin' all those hymns. Maybe then you could say somethin' that made some sense," John Paul said.

"Don't you tell me about the Bible. You're a sinner. You twist the words so they mean the wrong things." Sara was shouting now.

"I wasn't tryin' to tell you about the Bible, Sara. I just think that if you're goin' be a Christian and preach to everybody, you ought to know what you're talkin about."

"So now you're sayin' I'm not a Christian. Well I know one thing, I don't bring my sins down on my children. I don't give God a reason to punish me through my kids!"

"You're crazy, Sara," John Paul spoke softly, "God doesn't punish innocent children."

"He does! He does!" she screamed, "He does if their father is wicked. He does if their father doesn't believe in a God." John Paul ignored her and tried to make Billy stop crying. Kathy stared at her plate. I went upstairs and got my clothes. When I came down, John Paul was gone and Sara was screaming and praying for God to strike him down. No one noticed when I left.

Kathy came to my house about a month later, and asked if she could spend the night.

"Of course," my mother answered, "you don't have to ask, you're always welcome here." My mother always fussed over Kathy a lot, but it didn't cheer Kathy up that night, like it usually did. Kathy had lost some weight and there were dark circles around her eyes. She didn't say much until we were in my bed

and the lights were out. Then she whispered in my ear, "If I tell you somethin', promise you'll never tell anybody. Not even your mom."

"I won't."

"Swear it."

"I swear to God, I'll never tell anybody." I promised.

"I'm pregnant."

We lay there for a long time and no one spoke. I knew Kathy had been meeting a boy from school at ballgames and movies, but I didn't think they had ever been alone.

"Is it that guy at school's baby?" I finally asked.

"No, but he said he'd marry me." she answered. "But don't ask me anything else, Carrie. I won't tell you."

"But why won't you tell me, I swore I'd never tell anybody."

"Because it was an accident. The person thought I was somebody else. He didn't know what he was doing. Now don't ask me anything else about it." She was ready to cry, so I shut up.

That night for the first time since I had moved to Haldeman, I heard George Moore's rooster crow at dawn.

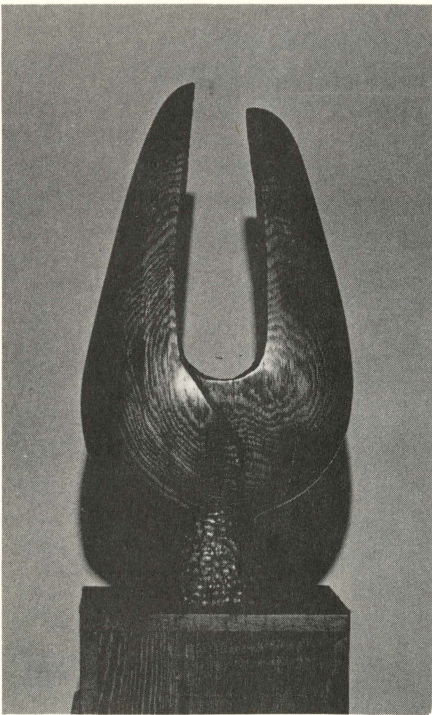
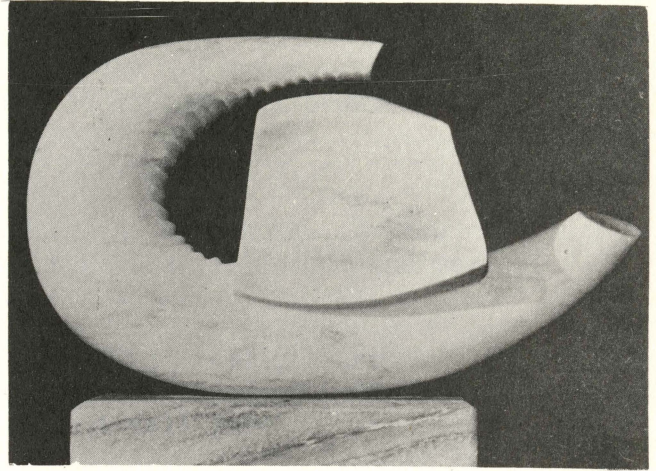
I went with Kathy the next day to tell Sara about the wedding. Sara took the news pretty well, I thought, considering she didn't even know Kathy had a boyfriend. Suprisingly, the town even approved the marriage. The boy turned out to be the steady quiet type, who obviously adored Kathy. He was a senior in school, with his future already planned out. He was going to take over the family hardware business in Morehead.

I was the maid of honor at the wedding. John Paul got drunk



just before it started, so my dad gave Kathy away. Sara insisted on singing, though everyone thought it was in bad taste.

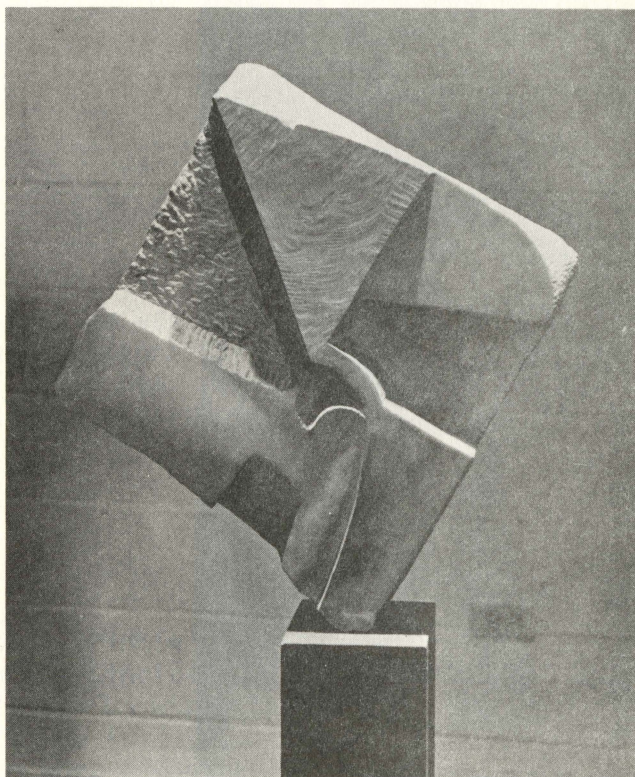
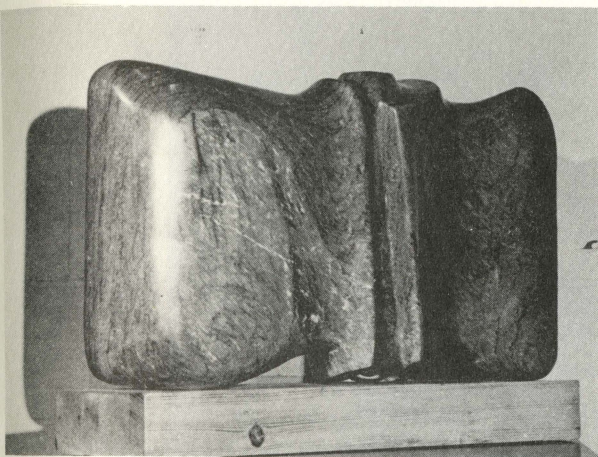
White Carrara Marble  
Eddie Horton



Oak Wood  
Joyce Feder



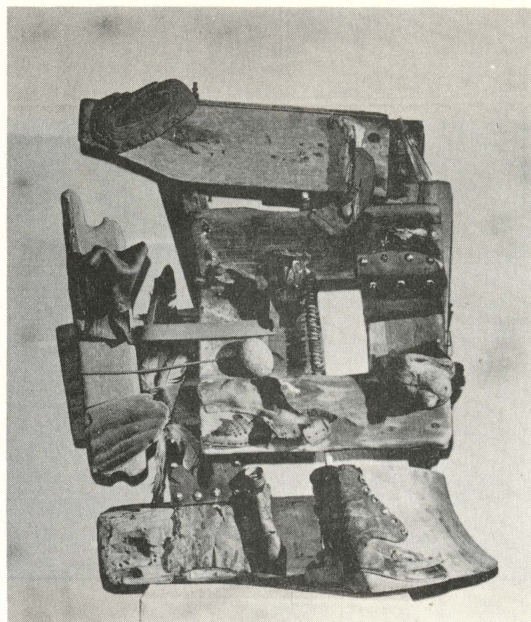
Grey Vermont Marble  
Joe Walters



Bluestone  
Mark Klinger



Ceramic  
Eddie Horton



Mixed Media  
Candy Barbee



LETTIN ON

Anne Shelby

"This is Virgie Carter. I'm callin about my husband. He ain't come home from work yet. I thought he might be down there."

"What's the name again?"

"Virgie Carter."

"Your husband's name."

"His name's Willie Carter."

He didn't say nothin, but I knew he was still on the line. I could hear him breathin over the telephone the way men do when they're smokin a cigarette, and I could hear people scrapin around on the cement floor, talkin and clearin their throats and rattlin papers.

"He ain't here, lady."

"Well, thank you anyway."

So he ain't in jail. He's been drinkin and that's right where I figured he'd be--right in the Cincinnati jail. Seems like that's where most hill people end up when they start drinkin up here. The best thing to do is just not to get out of the house. Just go straight to work and straight home and don't talk to nobody. Cause if you start talkin, they know right off where you're from. They don't like hill people up here. They like niggers better than they do hill people.

"Hush baby hush now Mama's here hush now darlin."

It's just like it was the other time we come up here. Only that time he was off four days and this time it ain't been but two. But I can see it comin--just like I did then. Come up here and he'd get a job, work a while and do good. Go to work ever day and bring his check home and Friday we'd go in and back Sunday night. Then it'd start in--drinkin and comin in late and then not at all.

It's hard on him I know. I know it's hard on me, bein' up here off from home, not knowin anybody and bein afraid to get out, penned up in this little place like a dog. But I can stand it. I've had two children. I can stand about anything. I think women can stand things better than men can. Mommie could stand things better than Daddy could. But she never let on. You have to act like they're stronger than you are. You can't let on you know they're not. If you do, they'll make you pay for it. One way or another they will.

I was better off that time than I am now though. Just had one baby then, and Hank and Thelma was up here to help me out. Now I don't know nobody. And it don't do much good to have a telephone if you don't know anybody to call on it.

"LuAnn, come here honey. Let's be real quiet now, and not wake up the baby. Come here, darlin, and let me tie your shoe."

You can't fool LuAnn. She knows it when there's something the matter. Right now she knows it as good as I do. Knows her daddy ain't been here for two days and knows I'm worried. She's sharp. I hope she does good in school. She will if she's not as shy as I was. I was afraid to talk in front of the class, even if I knew the answer. Willie never did care nothin about school. He's pitiful to watch when he's pretending he knows how to read somethin, and you know he can't read a word of it. And you feel sorry for him and don't want to say nothin.

Sometimes he can be the pitifullest person on earth. I just want to hold him like I do the baby, and take care of him.



But sometimes I wish I'd never seen him. Sometimes I can't feel sorry for him--he's so stubborn sometimes--but sometimes I can't help but feel sorry for him. I guess he's got to be stubborn. That's the only thing he's got.

But if I think about him too much. I can't think about myself and I can't think about the children. If I did, if I felt sorry for all of us, I guess I'd go crazy. I wouldn't be no good to anybody then. You have to be pretty particular who you're going to feel sorry for. If you're not, you'll end up feelin' sorry for everybody and that'd be too much to stand.

So I kind of take it time about. Sometimes I think I've got to worry just about me and the children, and not about him. At least then I could say it was me doin' it. it was me that was takin' care of us and not have to act like it was him, like he was the one that was doin everthing. You get tired of that mighty fast. You get tireder of that pretending than you do anything else. You don't mind all the work--it's hard but you can do it--you can cook and clean and have the children and raise them and you can love a man and try to keep him going. But then you have to turn right around and act like you're not the one that's doin it, like you're the one that needs him and he don't need you for nothin but to sleep with. That's the hardest part, when he won't let on like he needs you, when you both know good and well he does. That's the worst part of it, not the doin part, the pretendin part.

If I left him, though, he'd not get over it. He won't never be nothin more than he is now if I do stay, but if I go, he'll be less than that and that'd be my fault for leavin him. I don't know.

"LuAnn honey, go check on the baby and see if it's all right."

I hope that child does good in school. I hope she don't have to go to school up here though. I'd be afraid they'd

make fun of her the way they did Thelma's boy. Come home cryin ever day for awhile from the children makin fun of him--the way he talked and his clothes. Then he quit the cryin and they thought he'd worked it out all right. Come to find out he'd been hidin in the basement of the school ever day, down there behind the furnace.

He'd come after me if I left. I know he would. He did the other times. I went back but I wasn't satisfied. It wasn't the pretending that time. I hadn't got tired of that yet. I guess I thought that was just how it was and I could do it. Like a game. Then I was just scared-- of bein married and gettin pregnant and havin a baby. But I couldn't let on. And if I left again he'd come after me and he'd say he'd quit drinkin and stayin off from home. But that wouldn't satisfy me neither. It's just not that. It's the pretendin. But I couldn't tell him that. I couldn't let on. He'd think I was crazy.

"Hello. This is Virgie Carter. Can you tell me how much is the bus fare to Manchester, Kentucky?...No, just one way. But I've got a girl and a little baby with me."



## THE TRAINER

Jeffrey Rice

Only a few thin fingers of orange pointed into the ash trees beside the barn when Alden moved into the stall. Revival Fire stirred uneasily, his head down, his eyes following Alden, who reached out to stroke his long neck, rippling as Alden's hand ran smoothly through his mane and clasped about his hair.

"Hello, big boy. Hello, boy," Alden spoke low, reverently caressing the big horse's ears as he moved closer. Each morning his throat was tense and he grew hot as he stroked the horse.

"Oh, big horse! Revival Fire!"

Alden's excitement reached the horse, which snorted, flaring its nostrils. Each day his trainer's hand trembled from excitement, and the horse pawed the straw.

"How are you today, boy? How's those legs?" asked Alden. He slipped a leather bridle over the horse's nose, placing the steel bit carefully in Revival Fire's mouth, then pulled the bridle over his ears, fastening the strap beneath his jaws, "Whoa now, boy. Whoa, now, " he spoke quietly as he finished.

"Come on, boy. Let's go. Atta, boy." Alden moved the horse outside the stall, over to the tack room, then wrapped the leather straps he held about an oak post. He placed both hands on the stallion's back, rubbing firmly, before he threw a small, well-oiled English saddle across the horse's back. Tightening the saddle hurriedly, Alden became more nervous and fumbled with the strands of the cinch. Feeling his trembling, the horse half turned from Alden, who moved after

him.

"Whoa, boy. Whoa now." Alden drug out his vowels in each pronunciation of "whoa," intended to slow his own nerves as well as the horse's. Yet each heart still quickened, for just beyond the tack room was the track, and each was eager to begin the race past the white fence.

Riding Revival Fire was like yielding to the ocean's currents, carried by waves through all time into a world consisting solely of rhythm and harmony. Alden closed his eyes and rocked anxiously back and forth when he mounted the stallion from a fence post. His tough, sinewy arms had to pull on the reins, keeping the horse's head high, to hold him back as they trotted nervously onto the track.

Even with the early morning dew, a few fine particles of dust rose beneath the horse's hooves, each dancing high, dropping its stir of dust as Revival Fire strained against his bit. When Alden eased his pressure in the reins, the horse reached his long, easy strides farther down the track. His tempo quickened. Each hoof caught the earth just long enough to speed ahead. They hurried past the posts and stands, past the wooden fence which curved behind them silently.

Alden was aware of a change when the horse broke into a canter. Here was the smooth pace of all being that poured sweat from the rider's face. Beneath him was the cool earthen track, floating by, swirling brown currents in easy whispers. The waves rose and fell, rising closer and falling, ever gentle under the crest of the horse's back.

More rays of orange had climbed through the ash trees and onto the board fence since Alden entered the stall. These, too, floated smoothly past the horse and rider. Billows of green leaves waved overhead as even the thin branches seemed to catch the horse's pace. They rode as one with quick, upending waves.

"Oh, God. Oh, Lord!" Alden crooned to the sweet morning



air which rushed into his face. He moved his hands, still holding the reins, through the thick mane, caressing the strong neck which he could feel rising between his arms. Riding lower than a jockey, he pressed his lean legs to the horse's neck, feeling their muscles rise together.

"Run, you wind! Run!" he urged his horse, his voice becoming breathless, constricting with his excitement. He felt his chest tighten. "Oh, Lord, run!" he said, forcing the words.

"Oh, God, we're all here!" he screamed, waving one hand in a circle over Revival Fire's head, wobbling as the horse leaned stronger into the track's curve, causing Alden to clutch at the rein, yelling "Faster, boy! Faster!"

The ash trees were aglow with morning when Revival Fire turned from the track. Dark sweat hung to his deep chest, frothed about the neck with white. He blew heavily through his nostrils, blowing foam as he sought deep breaths to regain his wind. Alden was only barely conscious of the heaving sides beneath him, hypnotized by speed and the mysterious passing into another world, away from the gray sides of the tack room and the stable.

He slipped from the big horse's back and began uncinching the saddle. Yet he was unaware of his own action, caught somewhere rushing past post after post, still riding waves. He performed the grooming ritual by rote. Only gradually, wiping moisture, rubbing smooth hair, did he become aware of the movement of his hands and the heavy odor of linament.

"Good boy," he heard himself say to the stallion, becoming conscious of his lips' movement, wondering how long ago he'd begun his litany to Revival Fire. He slapped the horse affectionately on the flank.

Revival Fire blew less heavily, raising one forefoot and stroking the ground. The muscles through his neck and back

trembled, and he shook himself. His tired legs felt the stinging oil from the trainer's strong hand. He, too, it seemed, was only gradually attuning to the race's end.

As Alden's thoughts returned from circling the track, he wiped linament across the backs of his own tired arms. The sun was clearly visible on the treetops, but hung more like dread and weariness than a new day. He had lived the morning, as mornings before, when he first stepped into the stall with Revival Fire, and waited from day to day only to ride the tall horse, which he now led reluctantly to his stall. Closing him in was more like the end of day; Alden would have felt the world more in order had the sun sped suddenly across the track and passed beneath the western trees.

After his morning ride the trainer often spent entire days without leaving the horse's stall. Smoking in the corridors or napping on bales of straw, he dreamed of riding once again. Or waiting in the tack room, he spent complete afternoons with his dreamy gaze upon the oiled leathers and linaments, touching at times the orange and green silks which were worn by Revival Fire's jockey. Wherever he slept, he was amid a world of roses linked about the stallion's neck, with him astride, surrounded by a throng which moved with him and the horse, faster, ever riding the waves in a green and golden world, their prize a never-ending run.

"You and me, Revival Fire," he often said. "You and me."

But today Alden lingered only until midmorning, looking at the horse in the stall, stretching one hand toward him, before leaving. Slipping from his jeans and shirt, he splashed water on his face and dressed again. The starched collar of his white shirt crackled and scratched and his black tie seemed to choke him. He would much rather have dressed in the silks, which he touched softly. How beautiful they were, he thought, as he dusted his boots and left past the track and the ash trees, leaving the stall behind.



The sun soon crawled down his neck and brought stains beneath his arms as Alden walked the mile to the Baptist church. With each step his feet grew more leaden and the process of lifting his legs became a mechanical task. The sidewalk was hot beneath his feet. The sun glared at him. His boots squeaked as he drifted from one sultry pocket of air to still another. Cars hurried past without stopping, sending small rushes of air to fan the heat. Alden continued to lift his legs in succession, an automaton performing a processed operation.

Only a small bird that flew from a bush beside the road caught his attention. Alden paused to watch it flit from limb to limb then waver in the morning air before it disappeared from sight. His plodding steps began again. Scattered houses lined his path, becoming more dense as he neared the church. Morning noises filled the air but he was unaware of their diversions. His eyes continued straight ahead, without straying, seeming mesmerized.

On the wall in the tack room hung green and golden silks. On the stall beside the tack room was his horse, Revival Fire. On the bench in the the tack room he dreamed of wearing silks.

And on the sidewalk by the church Alden almost spoke aloud, "Green and golden silks." Arriving startled him. Week after week he was unaware of this world where he walked. The closed houses were foreign. The spire of the steeple reached far above him. He had crossed a strange desert, fighting to concentrate each step on the track, on the silks, on his horse.

"Each step I take," he heard as he placed one foot on the steps of the Baptist church, "takes me nearer home."

"Each step I take," he thought dreamily, humming with the singer's voice carrying from inside. He moved his other foot to continue up the stairs.

A cool rush of air conditioning escaped toward him when he opened the outer door and entered. The moisture beneath his

arms began to feel cool as he opened his eyes wider, suddenly conscious that he had been squinting against the sun.

From the vestibule he could see long rows of dark-stained pews stretching to the altar. Only a few scattered people were seated, for he was early. After a deep breath he continued forward, holding himself stiffly erect. His scuffed boots scraped across the carpet. He was aware of eyes watching him, but he kept his own vision forward, starting at a bronze cross wavering above the podium.

Alden turned left at the second pew from the front, sitting next to the aisle. He sat erect, as he had walked, without turning his head. Carnations rested on stands on either side of the podium.

In the tack room by the stall were green and golden silks. And the carpet was green here. In the windows green and golden glass was intermingled in depictions of Christ's life. In the church Alden sat alone on a dark-stained pew which stretched far out to the left.

Alden sat listening to the reverberations from the organ, feeling the deep tones vibrate through his chest, drifting at times with lines of the songs sung by a young blonde to the right of the altar. Little by little the church began to fill, and feet shuffled behind him. A few people moved through his line of vision, passing as forms to his left and right. A family moved past him to sit at his left. He held his legs tight to the bench to let them in, feeling their eyes on him. They smelled like deoderant. He smelled like linament and horse.

This fragrance of the tack room drifted abruptly to his senses as they sat down. The church seemed full of the odor. He pulled his shoulders together. The bench shifted slightly when the stocky mother eased down. He could feel her looking at him.



Alden longed to be back in the tack room or to be riding the waves of Revival Fire's back. Sunday after Sunday the church services dragged invariably on, more tiresome and infinitely more difficult to shut out than even the long walk from the track. Coming was entirely a matter of economic necessity. The trainer endured for the crisp pressure of money slipped to him by the minister at the end of each service. His lean fingers rubbed together as he stretched open his hands, imagining the feel of the paper.

The oak pew was hard. Though nearly the color of Revival Fire's hair, it did not rise and fall beneath him. When he was a boy, the chairs around the kitchen table were hard. His mother was tired. The cereal in his bowl grew sodden as he stared at it, wistfully recalling his brother's smooth silks, and his tales of horses.

His brother's brown hands were hard, but his eyes danced like horse's hooves, like the hooves which carried him fast and faster around curbed tracks past others, clear through into Alden's imagination.

The minister's hands danced in front of him, toward the congregation. He shifted weight behind the podium as he continued to open and close his mouth. He moved his lips much like Alden's teachers had and looked out in a similar fashion. The seats in the long rows at school had been hard as Alden dreamed of a faraway race.

The young blonde woman broke into a new song. Her lips opened and closed as Alden looked toward her blue eyes. Her golden hair hung about her shoulders. The green and golden silks hung in the tack room. She looked over the congregation, raising one slim arm, and Alden could feel it about his waist, clutching him as she clung with her knees to Revival Fire's back, her golden hair flowing behind him forever in the stream of the sun and the silks.

The minister's words edged into Alden's thoughts as the

minister stepped from behind the podium and left the platform, standing before the altar with one long arm outstretched over the congregation. "We are all one in the face of God," the minister boomed out, "Man and beast and grass are offspring of a single Creator."

"Each of us as man," he continued, "endures a single existence. Each is an entity, part of a larger entity sharing our common experiences." He drew closer to Alden. "We are all as this one man," he said, placing a large hand under the trainer's armpit, half supporting his weight as Alden rose from his seat and slipped into the aisle.

"Through all your lives many of you have walked indifferent paths alone without recognizing your greater part. You have isolated yourself on plateaus away from that which is part of you." The preacher boomed these words over the heads of the congregation, lifting Alden with one arm as he did so to the altar, where the trainer stood, still not as tall as the minister.

"You have left yourself balanced precariously on the edge of a dangerous world. And where can you go from there?" he asked. "Only down a single pathway which is bordered on all sides by a potential fall from your unstable perch!"

The congregation looked silently at Alden balanced on the altar, standing stiffly erect as if any movement would indeed cause him to fall. The blonde woman looked at him with her blue eyes and clutched her hands to her breasts. The fat woman in the pew he had vacated shifted on the hard boards.

"Breathe, " the minister said in a hushed voice, "there is only one thing we can do when we wake up and realize the reality of our situation--when we realize we are standing dangerously alone on a selfmade, artificial peak. We must commend ourselves to the hand of God!"

The minister stood quietly in front of Alden, his eyes closed, holding his hands out toward the congregation. Then



he began again, pointing one arm out. "But how, just how, you might ask, can we free ourselves from our toppling trap and commend ourselves to God."

"There is only one way friends. We must first develop a realization that, in our solitary lives, we have climbed away from the hand of God, that we have left the common humanity which is man. There is no other way. And once we realize what we have done," he continued, "we can only return by a total will to reunite with the all-being world which is God. There is no halfway path. We cannot walk with one foot in our own path and one foot in God's hand. To be completely with God," he said, turning to Alden, "we must jump clear of our own existence and depend solely on the strong hands of God to link us to his universe."

"We must jump free!" he shouted as Alden felt himself suspended above the altar, his arms out like the bird flying from the bush, his legs straight behind him, and the faces of the congregation in a cool world below him, a sea swirling with colors of clothes and sunlight, of carpet and dark pews, of green and golden waves which tugged at him with soft caresses, so he felt the current pulling him down and down, into the strong arms of the minister, swooping, then pulled up again with one strong arm as the man shouted, "Glory, hallelujah!"

"This is the plan of God's Salvation. Complete dependence on the flowing hands of God!"

The sea of faces still wavered before the trainer's gaze. He held to the minister. Despite the room's coldness, the pressure of his trial etched lines of perspiration across his forehead. The blonde woman stood and began singing a song. The congregation swept upward, eddying as they rose in song. The minister's strong voice embraced the others, swirling throughout the church.

Alden flowed through the aisle with the minister, who stopped by the vestibule as his hand pressed secretly into



Alden's, bearing a crisp, folded bill. Alden felt himself guided through the entranceway into a rushing billow of air. His eyes half shut, feeling struck by the sun.

The trainer's legs carried him down the steps and turned automatically right as the congregation began leaving the church behind him. How many times he had helped thus to illustrate the Plan of Salvation he could not say. No one need ever lecture him on the relativity of time, for he had lived in all time; he had drifted as long as he could remember from one flight about the track to another, and he had felt himself again and again suspended in easy rhythm on the back of Revival Fire.

Minutes did not count as he walked back and forth from the church, nor as he waited days in the tack room. He had never marked hours as one and then another as he slept fitfully on some bale of straw, to awake before dawn and slip into the horse's stall. Nor could he now, in retrospect, count one hour separate from another--no more than he could separate his flights from the altar into the open air above the minister's hands. For all time was now; each waiting moment and each floating instant above the sea fused into his training.

Without realizing it himself, Alden quickened his pace toward the track, in a manner somehow unlike all such trips before. The sidewalk wavered constantly as he rode it toward Revival Fire. The money fell from his hand onto the sidewalk, but he did not notice. It blew behind him, but he was running in the opposite direction leading to the tack room which was home, to the silks, to his own time waiting in the stall.

His lungs hurt for more air, but he still pushed his feet forward. He knew. He had seen, there above the sea of faces. He was thirty-four and he was his own jockey. He was on his own perch high above the carpet and the earth track, above the fat lady and the blonde, floating down.

Alden's feet hurried over the gravel toward the stalls.



Moisture crawled back under his arms and crept down his back. It rolled into his eyes, turning. His sides ached.

These pains did not matter. For Alden had reached the oak post where each day he wrapped the leather straps of Revival Fire's bridle. The post was cool, and inside were the green and golden silks, which Alden held like a soft baby. They, too, were cool, caressing his skin. He had never worn them before, and donned them now, dropping his own clothes to the floor, almost reverently. He reached his arms out before him, and held them high. In the mirror he could see his flushed face radiant in the bright colors.

He was his own jockey, sweeping a bridle from the wall. His heart beat rapidly, and he walked stiffly to calm himself before entering the great horse's stall. The door swung open and he stood quietly as Revival Fire stirred uneasily, his head down. Alden stretched his hand to the horse's long neck, running his fingers through the mane and clasping hair.

"Hello, big boy," he said breathlessly. "Hello there. Surprised I'm back? I'll bet you are, boy." He slipped the bridle over the horse's head and fastened it as he had done earlier that day. Revival Fire pawed at the straw. His legs still ached, but he was always eager for a flight around the track.

"Come on now, boy," Alden crooned. "Come on. We're going out." His hands trembled.

Alden wrapped the reins around the oak post. He tossed the saddle nervously on the horse's back, fumbling the cinch as he tightened it. Short quick steps led them to the fence which he climbed to jump astride the horse.

When Revival Fire felt his weight, he jerked eagerly toward the track, but Alden pulled on the reins, leading him away from the barn and the track, toward the ash trees.

"No, boy," he said, "We're not going there today." He shook his arms, causing sun to flash across the shiny green and gold, and nudged a heel into the stallion's flank. "Come on, boy."

Revival Fire picked his feet high toward the trees. Nickered nervously, he followed Alden's guiding hands, his feet beginning to dance across green grass.

"That's it, boy," whispered Alden. "That's it. We've got a race. One smooth run into all being."

Revival Fire's pace quickened. Grass rushed behind him with the ash trees. He broke into a run, floating above a sudden wave of daffodils. A stone fence, belly high, rushed toward him, and Alden loosened his rein, floating with the horse above the limestone wall. They ran past a duck pond and grazing cattle. Another low stone fence floated beneath them and the horse clattered on a sidewalk, clacking steel shoes across the highway and through an open gate.

The horse's long strides stretched ahead though his sides heaved. Alden could feel the lungs pounding against his legs and began crooning again. "Run, boy. Run," he said.

"You and me, boy. You and me, Revival Fire! This is the race. Our race, boy!"

Wind swept through the horse's mane and the trainer's hair. Revival Fire stretched his long legs across the grass. A clump of birch trees drifted beside and then behind them.

Alden's arms began to ache again as he held them above the horse's neck. Sensing his horse's weariness, he rose higher, urging him on. He had long been riding Revival Fire, and this was the race for which he had been training.

"Run, you wind," he yelled to the big horse. "We're going to make it, boy. Revival Fire!"



The big horse sped on, past green waves. The straight chairs of Alden's childhood kitchen washed by. His brother's bright eyes joined the sea. The bright silks caught at Revival Fire's mane, angling the horse across the pasture toward a third stone fence.

Revival Fire seemed to regain his wind. His chest heaved deeper and his legs did not falter. He had been run hard time and again, and had learned the long race. His feet pounded blades of clover.

Alden rose excitedly on the horse's back, almost standing as they neared the stone wall. He waved an arm above the horse's head. "We're all here!" he screamed.

The trainer's heart pounded. "You and me," he said again to the big horse. "We're out ahead!" he yelled, and Revival Fire floated out over the limestone wall, over ivy clinging to the rock, where horse and rider hung suspended high above a river, for the wall they had scaled stood at the edge of a cliff. Alden felt himself drifting as he had practiced week after week over a sea of faces. He floated down past layers of granite and shale, the big horse's legs spread wide as Alden crooned, "All now. All now."

## STEP TO THE REAR

Maryanne Walters

April sunshine and a promise of roses on the fence and Mrs. Mulligan rooting in her oversized purse for a dime. Ah, spring again, she thought. And seemingly feeling the same the rattleclap bus came leaping up the street, stopping precisely at the curb, and throwing open the door in an effort to let out some of the still forward-coming motion.

"Good morning, you sprite young thing," the bus driver crooned as he helped all two hundred pounds of her into the bus. A bit of a blush tinged her cheeks and she dabbed with a kleenex at the moisture on her forehead as she sat down on the long seat paralleling the windows.

"Such a climb for an old lady," she retorted smiling to Mr. Kennedy as he pulled the door shut and pushed the gear into second. "Someday maybe they'll lower the floors for us not-so-young types."

"Either that or raise the sidewalks," he chuckled. Mr. Kennedy automatically signaled right and turned up Poplar Avenue with Joe's Delicatessen to his left. He was a thin man, fitted to the worn seat that was his daily bread. His hands were long and bony, but soft as beaten leather. Curving over the throttle, these same hands that had just helped Mrs. Mulligan on the bus also shifted the gears and rotated the large steering wheel in front of him. And a smile. His face always wore a smile. "It's a regular Santa Claus grin," Mrs. Mulligan would tease him. And today it was especially big, especially happy.

At the top of the hill on Poplar, he pulled to the curb for Mr. Johnson.



"Hey Tom, how's it feel to be retired? Going shopping with your free time?" Tom was what Mrs. Mulligan called a distinguished gentleman. His dark hair was handsomely streaked with gray and he always smoked a pipe.

"Say now. Look who's got the easy sit-down job. Why before I retired I was always on my feet."

"I know how you carpenters are. Remember, my brother's in the business." Mr. Kennedy waited for two other men to get on and then pulled the door shut. Turning right on School Street the city-owned vehicle bounced and rattled over the rough, potholed pavement. Mr. Purdy looked up and waved as he followed the sidewalk to the red-flagged mailboxes along his delivery route. For almost fifteen years now, Mr. Kennedy had known him, in better days when both of them were much younger.

Fifteen years. That was a long time, driving the same route, following the same streets day after day. Why he could tell you when the town first got a traffic light at Fifth Street, and when it had new water lines put in along the Avenue. He knew what day Mr. Bricking watered his lawn and what time the train from Louisville crossed under Center Street. And fifteen years. Fifteen years of faces--some the same, some always changing. Some were as old as him, and some--like Mr. Johnson--had beaten him to a life of social security checks and afternoons watching the grandchildren. But that would all change--very soon--very soon.

"Hey, Mister, how much does it cost to ride this bus?" Mr. Kennedy looked down at a short, freckled-face youngster beating off imaginary flies with his Little League cap.

"It's forty-five cents one way. Are you going all by yourself?"

"Of course. I'm ten years old."

"What are you going to do in town?"

"Probably get a plane and go to New York. My dad's there. Only--"

"Only what?"

"Only I only got a quarter left from my allowance."

"Well, I'm afraid I can't help you. Why don't you settle for an ice ball at Fred's?"

"Okay," he mumbled, a smile hiding beneath his freckles.

And Mr. Kennedy pulled away from the curb twisting his huge steering wheel around and around. What a boy, he thought, just like my grandson Tommy.

The morning sun melted away the river's fog as he moved his bus down along the Avenue. Young mothers with babies and businessmen with newspapers under their arms crowded the curbs waiting for the rickety rattle of his silver and green bus.

"Such a shaky bus," Mrs. Mulligan would complain. "Me and my poor arthritis." Mrs. Mulligan and her arthritis, and her gout, and her bad sinuses. And naturally it must be Friday because Friday was the only day Mrs. Mulligan took the bus. Friday was her day to get medicine for the coming week. She would arrive back on the bus at 5 o'clock with aspirin, nasal decongestants, vitamins, and tubes and tubes of Ben-Gay. Once he had asked her what her doctor said about all this.

"Doctor? Mr. Kennedy what do you think--I am some kind of millionaire? I'm no schnook. Why should I pay to have a doctor tell me to take aspirin? I'll go do it myself."

Mrs. Mulligan was her own woman at least as far as Mr. Kennedy could tell. She started riding his bus close to two years ago, shortly after her husband died. Complaining--yes, but always with that hint of humor. And as Mr. Kennedy looked into his huge rear view mirror, he saw her displaying



pictures of her grandchildren to one of the new faces seated beside her.

On the corner of Ward Avenue he edged the bus once again to the yellow markings and swung the door open.

"Hi, Art. Hey, did you see that game last night. Wasn't that a great eighth inning?" Jim Kroger was the only one who called Mr. Kennedy by his first name, not that he minded; in fact, he rather preferred it. But the majority of his passengers felt that it was somehow less respectful.

"Yes, it was a great game except I wish I had bet Tom more money."

Mr. Johnson pulled out his pipe and laughed, "It was lucky for me I didn't. My wife was upset enough over baseball starting. She claims all I do since I retired is watch T.V."

"Which is no doubt true," Mrs. Mulligan chided. She was never one to be left out.

"Well, believe me you don't have to be retired to get chewed out for watching baseball," Mr. Kennedy added as he left the Twelfth Street Bridge and headed for the terminal.

"Amen to that!" And Jim picked up his homemade sack lunch while the tires squealed in the hollow blackness of the terminal.

Smiling, Mr. Kennedy goodbyed each and every passenger as he or she deposited the fare into the clicking money sorter. Click-click-click and a few toddlers would have to be dragged away from the fascinating machine. Mrs. Mulligan waited until everyone else had left and then she pulled herself up by grabbing the silver pole near the sorter. Her change clattering in the machine; Mr. Kennedy escorted her down the stairs.

"Have a nice day," he called as she wobbled out of sight.

His prenoon run was never full. The bulk of passengers seemed to come in early morning or late afternoon coinciding with the nine-to-five hours of the city's businesses. And then too the use of city busses had tapered down a lot in the past years. Seats were always vacant, and it had been years since he had people standing in the aisles. It was most probably all the new cars and the more reasonable prices. But to many people like him, the bus had always been one of his primary modes of transportation. And fifteen years ago, it had become not only his means of transportation but his way of life.

And today was his last day. No one knew besides his family and his boss. Perhaps that was unfair. Perhaps that was even cheating--to allow all his regular customers to suddenly discover themselves with a new driver. But then what difference could it make to tell them. It would still be his last day and tomorrow he would officially retire. But for now at least he chose to keep the present as normal and easy-going as it had always been.

Two years ago John McCormick had retired. Someone on the bus found out and planned a huge grand finale ride. And there amid crepe paper and balloons, a diverse collage of faces presented him with a silver watch. And afterwards in the terminal he had turned his watery eyes to Art and mumbled, "Damn, it almost makes me feel guilty to leave."

And besides Art concluded as he bit into his ham sandwich, celebrations are for families not passengers.

After lunch, Art climbed back into his bus and walked down the aisle cleaning seats and picking up gum wrappers and newspapers. In the fourth seat he found a wooden paddle and ball set. Kids. Always forgetting something. Just like his own grandchildren, all five of them. No, retirement sounded wonderful to him. And after all wasn't that what his job had been all about. The years and years of struggling and day after day effort. Wasn't it all meant to end in a steady pension and a daily diet of free time?



He put the toy by his thermos. If no one came for it, he'd save it for Tommy.

And yet he still wondered sometimes what it would be like, what the new He would be like, when he was gone.

At five-ten he bounced the bus out of the glaring afternoon sun into the cool dusk of the terminal for his final run. Pulling the large wheel around and around, he angled the hulking vehicle along the concrete semicircle stopping at the last group of benches. They were all there--Tom Johnson, Jim Kroger, Mrs. Mulligan--all there sitting on the peeling words and pictures of the warped, wooden seats. Mr. Kennedy swung the door open and hopped down, allowing his riders to file in.

"Hey Art, don't forget the game tonight. We're playing Atlanta."

"Oh that's right, Jim. I almost forgot. Say Tom, want to make another bet."

"No way! I'm no sucker. And besides the little woman would kill me. It's her money."

"And if she didn't, I think I'd try to get in a few licks for her." Mrs. Mulligan winked a smile at Mr. Kennedy as he took her bag of cure-alls and helped her up the steps.

A motley crew of factory workers, package-covered shoppers, and white-shirted businessmen gazed restfully out the windows as Mr. Kennedy led the bus across the bypass and onto the bridge already packed with rush hour traffic.

On the other side at Ward Avenue, Jim Kroger walked to the door without bothering to pull the buzzer.

"Bye Art. Have a nice weekend. I'll see you Monday."

"Have a good weekend yourself." He turned the bus onto

the Avenue keeping the river on his left. Uncomfortably he ignored the "see you Monday." At Fifth Street he pulled to the corner and swung the door open.

"Hey, will there be another bus soon?" The almost bald-headed man leaning on his cane squinted up at Mr. Kennedy.

"There'll be one along directly, sir."

"Thank ye, thank ye, son. I'll tell the old woman."

Now there was one for the books. His wife christened him the Judge the first night Art had told her about the man, and the name stuck. Judge, whoever he was, never rode the bus; but daily at 5:20 waited to ask over and over again when the next bus was. And of all Mr. Kennedy's replies for the past six months, he seemed to like "It'll be along directly" best.

"Too bad he's married," Mrs. Mulligan had once commented. "I might be tempted to give up the single life."

The bus hurried along shaking its sides impatiently at red lights and trailing its rear precariously through green lights. It seemed to sense the finality of the trip and to be in a rush to be done with it. Mr. Kennedy, however, failed to notice. He focused his attention on the faces disappearing into the streets, leaving behind only the clicking of their money in the sorter. It was the last time and that was good, wasn't it?

"Well, here's your winnings, you old bum. Say "Hi" to the wife for me. Bye."

Tom dropped his fare into the clicking machine and swung himself down to the sidewalk. Mr. Kennedy pulled the door shut, watching the man he soon would be hugging assorted grandchildren and digging surprises for them out of his pockets. Yes, it was good. Why on earth should he doubt it?

His final stop of the day, of the year, of his life was



the corner of Center and Poplar Streets. Pulling over he put the bus into park and went over to Mrs. Mulligan. She was still seated, rooting in her overstuffed brown bag seemingly oblivious to him.

"Here it is. I knew I bought it."

"What is it?" Mr. Kennedy stared at the apothecary bottle of tiny capsules she had handed him.

"Vitamin A tablets, of course. I've been noticing how you're always squinting so as to see better. So I picked that up for you. Just one every morning. Should help."

Mr. Kennedy ran his fingers over the glass exterior and white plastic cap. "Mrs. Mulligan--I--what I mean is--uh--you're a beautiful lady, you know that?"

"Sure do. My husband always said so. But I must admit it sounds nice comin' from you." Grabbing the pole, she pulled herself up. "Well, help me down before that nosey woman up the street gets any ideas."

He escorted her down to the sidewalk with a special reverence and kissed her on the cheek.

"Lord a'mighty--all that for some pills."

As she hobbled up the street, Mr. Kennedy stared at his first and only farewell present.

## II

A week later Mrs. Mulligan waited impatiently for the old rattletrap bus to appear. There were a few rose buds on the fence and a postcard was clenched in her hand. Just when the church bells began to ring out 8 o'clock, the bus crested the

hill and halted at the curb. The door swung open and Mrs. Mulligan found herself face to face with a young, neatly uniformed driver.

"Morning ma'am," he flashed a courteous smile at her and waited.

Mrs. Mulligan eyed his uniform, his toothy smile, and finally the three steps. It was a long pause. The new driver scooted impatiently in his seat.

"Well, I never--" and with obvious effort she grabbed at every immovable object and managed at last to hoist herself in.

"Step to the rear, please," he sang out. Mrs. Mulligan stared back into the half empty bus, but obligingly edged herself seat by seat to a spot midway along the aisle.

Moving forward the bus sped along still rattling somewhat but with more of a precise tempo. Following the same route, the bus halted at the top of Poplar for Mr. Johnson. His surprised stare at the new driver was interrupted only by Mrs. Mulligan waving the creased postcard back and forth and calling his name in a loud whisper.

"Morning sir. Step to the rear, please." The door closed, the bus moved forward and a still awe-struck Mr. Johnson found his way to Mrs. Mulligan.

"It's from Mr. Kennedy. He's in Florida."

"Florida?"

"Yes, he and his wife are visiting with their eldest daughter and her family."

"Oh, it's a vacation."

"No, he's retired now. Should be back in a month or so,



I'd say."

"Well, that old son-of-a-gun, always kidding me about my easy life. I wonder why he didn't say anything?"

"I don't know. Been wondering myself."

The bus pulled to the corner of School Street and the Avenue. Two businessmen got on and behind them stood a young pigtailed girl with a baby carriage.

"Hey mister, how much does it cost for me and my baby to ride?"

"Sorry young lady, this bus is not a toy. Please stand back."

The new driver twisted the wheel and the bus moved out into traffic, leaving the tiny girl staring confusedly at its departure. Proceeding to the bridge, the driver made his last stop at Ward Avenue where Jim Kroger jumped aboard.

"Morning, sir. Step to the rear, please."

Jim did a double-take as he headed for a seat.

"Hey Jim," Mr. Johnson stood up and motioned him back. "Did you hear--?"

"Please remain seated, sir, while the bus is in motion. Thank you."

Mr. Johnson sat back down and Jim joined him. "Did you hear about Mr. Kennedy?"

"No, not yet. When I saw the new driver I thought he might be sick."

"No, no. He retired. Mrs. Mulligan got a postcard from

from him."

"Florida? My gosh. And he's retired. Well I--I just don't know what to think."

"He's just visiting for a while, so we'll probably see him when he gets back." Mrs. Mulligan tucked the card back in her purse.

"Maybe. But I don't think it will be quite the same. There's something about this bus and the people," Tom reflected puffing heavily several times on his pipe."

"I wonder why he didn't say anything." Jim picked up his paper sack lunch as the bus rolled into the terminal.

"Who knows," Mrs. Mulligan concluded. "Who knows?"

As the weeks passed, Mrs. Mulligan rode the bus less and less. She started ordering medicine from the local druggist or asked her daughter to pick it up when she went shopping. Mr. Johnson began driving his old Pontiac again, even though with parking costs it was much more expensive. And Jim Kroger, newspaper in hand, got a ride with his neighbor across the street. Things had changed; he felt it.

But the old bus continued to follow the same route, the same streets day after day. And year after year it was filled with face after face. Some were the same. Some were always changing. But who would know now; who would care?



